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ABSTRACT

This monograph contains eleven exemplary articles that focus on topics related to competency-based adult education. Among the articles included are (1) Competency Based Education: Is It Applicable to Adult Education Programs?, by James E. Hertling; (2) What Adult Performance Level Is--and Is Not, by William G. Spady; (3) Competency Based Education: A Bandwagon in Search of a Definition, by William G. Spady; (4) Competency-Based Adult Education: Toward a Functional Definition, by Paul G. Taylor; (5) Process Approaches to CBAE Staff and Program Development: The California Experience, by John W. Tibbetts and Dorothy Wesby-Gibson; (6) Designing Competency Based Learning Centers, by Laurel Adler; (7) Don't Bother Us... We can Cope: CBE for English as a Second Language; (8) A Survey of Participants of the New Jersey Life Skills Education Programs, by Warren Ceurvels; (9) Competency-Based Adult Education in Pre-GED Programs: A Case Study of the Louisiana Experience, by Robert W. Boyet and Sam V. Danzat; (10) The Current Status of Research, by Joan Keller Fischer; and (10) Competency Based Adult Education: A Metamorphosis in Literacy Education, by Carol E. Kasworm. (LRA)

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THE CB READER

A GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING THE COMPETENCY-BASED ADULT EDUCATION MOVEMENT

Edited by

James T. Parker and Paul G. Taylor
Institute for Adult Competency

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

INTRODUCTION i

COMPETENCY BASED EDUCATION: IS IT APPLICABLE TO ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS? By James E. Hertling 1

WHAT APL IS -- AND IS NOT By Waynne B. James 8

COMPETENCY BASED EDUCATION: A BANDWAGON IN SEARCH OF A DEFINITION By William G. Spady 17

COMPETENCY-BASED ADULT EDUCATION: TOWARD A FUNCTIONAL DEFINITION By Paul G. Taylor 34

PROCESS APPROACHES TO CBAE STAFF AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT: THE CALIFORNIA EXPERIENCE By Dr. John W. Tibbetts and Dr. Dorothy Westby-Gibson . . . 49

DESIGNING COMPETENCY BASED LEARNING CENTERS By Laurel Adler 61

DON'T BOTHER US...WE CAN COPE: CBE FOR ESL By Joann LaPerla Berg and Beverly Galley Schwartz 70

A SURVEY OF PARTICIPANTS OF THE NEW JERSEY LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION PROGRAMS By Warren S. Ceurvels 79

COMPETENCY-BASED ADULT EDUCATION IN PRE-GED AND GED PROGRAMS: A CASE STUDY OF THE LOUISIANA EXPERIENCE By Robert W. Boyet and Dr. Sam V. Dauzat 86

THE CURRENT STATUS OF CBAE RESEARCH By Joan Keller Fischer 96

COMPETENCY BASED ADULT EDUCATION: A METAMORPHOSIS IN LITERACY EDUCATION By Carol E. Kasworm 113

INTRODUCTION

The idea of competency runs deep in the history and practice of adult education. From the beginnings of the national adult basic education effort in the early 1960's, it has been felt by many that our program has something unique to offer adults: a program that could enhance their ability to deal with adult responsibilities, whether that means employability, functional literacy, secondary-level certification, consumer awareness, or a host of other adult needs.

Competency-Based Adult Education (CBAE) finds its roots in the social needs soil of the 60's, and in other related areas of education and society. But the movement itself started about 1975 when three important developments in the adult education field came to fruition:

1) The New York External High School Diploma Program held it's first graduation. Adults were awarded diplomas based solely on demonstrated competency.

2) The Adkins Life Skills Protram was successfully training Life Skill Educators, and developing adoptor sites - programs to assist adults to become significantly more employable, by becoming competent.

3) The Adult Performance Level (APL) research project published its report on Adult Functional Competency in this country, and the U.S. Office of Education not only accepted the report and approved its findings, but widely publicized the outcomes and implications of the APL research.

Other events in the educational world have influenced the CBAE movement. The development of Performance-Based Teacher Education in the K-12 arena helped in the conceptualization of CBAE. The excellent competency-based work in adult vocational education and, to a lesser degree, in post-secondary education have made their contributions.

However, because educators have seen "movements" come and go, particularly in the past twenty years, they are justifiably skeptical about new-fangled ideas, techniques and systems. By describing the roots of CBAE we are suggesting that CBAE is not a fad, but rather a continuing and progressive development of Adult Education itself.

Since the mid-1970's there have been numerous indicators of a movement in adult basic education towards CBAE:

- from 1976 - 1979 an average of 44 states funded over 150 special development projects in functional competency each year. A total of $20 million was invested during this three year period.

- the National Diffusion Network (NDN) has certified two exemplary Adult Education programs, the Texas APL competency-based program and the New York External Diploma Program, and funded each to train adult educators to establish adoptor sites throughout the country. These two remain the only Adult Education programs certified by the NDN.

- several major publishing houses are now marketing APL-based/functional competency materials on a national basis, thus providing an additional "national sense" to the movement, and opportunity to compare and study impacts of these products among states.

- since 1976 there have been seven national conferences on CBAE: two were called by the U.S. Office of Education and included state directors of adult education, other state staff, research and program developers. One conference covered a specific area of CBAE - its impact on corrections education. Three other national conferences were sponsored, in part, by state departments of education - two in California, one in Texas. They responded to staff development needs of a variety of adult educators. The most recent conference, co-sponsored by the Florida Adult Education Association and the Institute for Adult Competency, dealt with a wide variety of CBAE developments and issues such as CB publications, research, staff development strategies, CBE and ESL, adult vocational education, state planning for CBAE, and other topics. The importance of these national conferences is that they each have added to our knowledge of CBAE practice, have helped pin-point concerns and issues, and have provided invaluable opportunities for professional dialog.
- starting with the AEA Conference in Salt Lake City in 1975, every national AEA/NAPCAE Conference has seen a substantial number of CBAE presentations. The most recent NAEC, in Boston, listed eleven CBAE sessions in the program.
- Title XIII of the Education Amendments of 1978, better known as the Adult Education Act, has "legitimized" competency-based approaches to basic education. The statement of purpose, subdivided into three elements, clearly indicates the functional nature of literacy: in dealing with society, secondary completion, and employability areas.
- The U.S. Secretary of Education has identified a number of national priorities for the consideration of state directors' fundings of special projects and teacher training. These priorities strongly reflect needs for competency-based adult program development, staff development, and strategies for dissemination and adoption of CBAE materials.

Why a CB Reader Now?

All of the above events and others have greatly influenced the literature of Adult Education. In particular, two major journals - Adult Literacy and Basic Education, the journal of the ABE Commission and Exchange, the journal of the National Association for Public and Continuing Adult Education - have published CBAE and related articles in each edition since 1977. Two of the national CBAE conferences have published proceedings which provide significant contributions to the literature. We believe that a "critical mass" of literature has now developed, and that by compiling selected works, we can also contribute to the understanding of CBAE by the field.

Understanding of CBAE, being "CB literate," is critical at this state of development. As important as are the years of research and development, and the millions of dollars invested, little will have been accomplished if AE staff at all levels cannot deal with CBAE processes in their worlds. We find the most progressive CBAE states are those that are now involving all levels of adult educators, from state education boards to local instructors, in setting the goals, dealing with the issues, and reaping the benefits of CBAE.

Then, there are criticisms of CBAE - some valid, some not. It is important to know enough to distinguish between them. This monograph can help in this area too. Major criticisms include:

- CBAE is confusing. We don't know what it is, or what it's doing for AE.
- CBAE is just another form of minimum competency test (it isn't).
- It lacks a definition that I can use.
- It's another fad.
- CBAE is not good adult education - it uses pre-determined objectives... dehumanizes students.
- The Feds will surely impose a National Competency Test on local programs.
- Assessing reading levels is tough enough - we'll never be able to assess competencies.
- ABE/GED programs are not compatible with CBAE processes.
- It lacks substantive research to support some of its claims.

The list is long, but adult educators are beginning to answer the questions; meet the criticisms.

THE ARTICLES

Of the dozens of articles, proceedings and reports on CBAE available, we have chosen eleven. There are compromises a plenty in choosing these. Our criteria included variety of topics and programs, historical, process value, definitional value, issues clarification, and, of course, quality of copy. This is not to suggest that these are the best articles in the field. They are among the best. They are merely included to increase adult educators' understanding of CBAE.

Some important CBAE topics are not covered in this monograph because they are readily available in more useful formats. For example, competency-based adult vocational education programs are doing some of the best CB work in the country, but an in-depth look at this subject is available in John Boulmetis' new book Job Competency: Adult Vocational Instruction. Likewise, the New York External Diploma Program (and others) are explained in detail in Ruth Nickse's new work Assessing Competency: The New York State External High School Diploma Program. Both publications will soon be available from Fearon-Pitman Publishers, Inc.

James Hertling's short article "Competency-Based Education: Is It Applicable To Adult Education Programs? was published in Adult Leadership in 1974. It is the first article in a national adult education journal to suggest that CBE could be an important process for adult education program development. He also identifies concerns that still must be dealt with by CBAE programs. Hertling is Dean of Continuing Studies at the University of Indiana.

When Waynne James wrote her widely discussed article on "What APL Is--And Is Not," she was a visiting lecturer in the Adult and Extension Education Program at Texas A&M University. Her cooperative work with the University of Texas APL team was sufficient to distinguish her as a "knowledgeable other," and to allow her to be a critic - at a time when quality of criticism was of real concern to us. James' piece, then, represents a useful criticism of APL (in 1977), particulary as it relates to CBE. And her closing line is as classic as her good timing: "APL may not be a panacea..., but it is certainly much better than teaching Elizabethan sonnets to future morons, murderers, and thieves." Waynne is now developing the Adult Education graduate program at Oklahoma State University.

While not an adult educator, William Spady has had a tremendous impact on the conceptualization and utilization of CBE by the Adult Education field. Spady came to our attention when he was with the National Institute of Education, and working with the Washington, D.C. School Board CBC Program (competency-based curriculum, K-12 and adult). Yes, friends this is the "Bandwagon Bill" you've heard of, and the article that gives him that distinction. It's an article that has been useful in a number of ways - as a catalyst for definition - building; as a major criticism of minimum competency testing as practiced in dozens of states (mostly K-12, fortunately); as a hopeful call for sane educational policy in an era of accountability and "back-to-basics." Bill continues to impact on, and provide leadership to, CBE efforts in his role as director of the National Center for Improvement of Learning, AASA.

A major criticism of CBAE is that it lacks a wide-spread and accepted definition. Not anymore. Paul Taylor has written certainly the most in-depth and extensive piece available on CBAE definition. The article is based on work accomplished at the New Orleans CBAE workshop in 1978, and is a tool to help you decide on the most useful way for your program to define CBAE. (Since Paul is co-editor of this monograph, we'll not carry-on about his many contributions to CBAE).

John Tibbetts and Dorothy Westby-Gibson are a team of staff developers that have been deeply involved in CBAE not only in their home state of California, but nation-wide. They have chaired two of the national CBAE conferences and done numerous presentations at state and national professional meetings. Their article lays out California's major CBAE processes, both for staff development and the development of programs. In a field that too often separates process from staff and program planning, we find their integrative approaches most exciting. Both Tibbetts and Westby-Gibson are professors at San Francisco State University.

Another major "movement" in the field of adult education was the development of learning centers in the early 1970's. Now an established delivery system in AE, learning centers are also proving to be useful implementors for CBAE. Laurel Adler has been an experienced learning center director and CB'er. Her article explains how and why learning centers are natural territory for competency-based programs. Laurel has recently become the Director of Manpower Training in El Monte, California.

One-third of the ABE program is English-as-a-Second Language (ESL). Beverly Schwartz and Joann La Perla Berg take a look at what goes on in ESL programs. CBAE is viewed as a process in harmony with the goals of most ESL approaches. Their article examines the role of the ESL instructor in a CBAE program and four important differences between the organization of a "traditional" ESL class and a "competency-based" process.

Warren Ceurvels, Director of the Adult Education Resource Center, Upper Montclair, NJ has written one of the few articles available on Adkins Life Skills Employability

Series. His survey of participants of the New Jersey Life Skills Programs shows that participation in this program increases employability.

Perhaps the greatest debate in the field in recent years has been skill-based vs. competency-based instructional approaches. While it is far from being resolved, one special project in particular has shed light on the usefulness of CB approaches as compared with more traditional ABE program techniques. From 1975-77 Robert Boyet, formerly of the Louisiana State Department of Education and now a local Adult Education Director, and Sam Dauzat, a professor at Louisiana Tech University, conducted on important comparative study on APL competency-based programs. Their article is based on the findings of that study.

In 1978 at the National Workshop on Adult Competency Education in New Orleans, Joan Fischer delivered the first address on the status of CBAE research. Her address, and subsequent literature based on her studies, have continued to capture the attention of many adult education researchers and practitioners. The article included in this monograph outlines much of the recent research in CBAE, and raises issues that remain current as CBAE moves into the 80's. Joan is Associate Director of Community Services at Worcester State College, Massachusetts.

Carol Kasworm chaired the 2nd National CBAE Conference, in Austin, Texas. Her article, which concludes this monograph, was also the capstone for her own book of proceedings of the national workshop. As such, it synthesizes various themes inherent in the CBAE movement, and also sets the challenge for keeping CBAE in touch with the needs of the field and its clients. Carol is a professor of adult education at the University of Texas.

This then is the first book of readings in Competency-Based Adult Education. If it adds to your understanding of the issues and opportunities of this movement, we and the authors have met our objectives.

James T. Parker and Paul G. Taylor

COMPETENCY BASED EDUCATION:
IS IT APPLICABLE TO ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS?

By

James E. Hertling

Competency-based education (CBE) has attracted widespread attention in recent years. Although the number of educators expressing an interest in the concept far outnumbers those who are actually using it, the application of CBE to educational programs has become increasingly prevalent. While the concept has been most commonly applied to teacher education programs, it is adaptable to all forms and all levels of education, including adult education programs. CBE is particularly suited to adult education programs because adults have often acquired a wealth of practical experience which may enable them to demonstrate attainment of specific competencies without taking formal coursework. Thus, they would be given credit for competencies which they have already acquired.

CBE has been described as a significant reform by some, and an ill-conceived fad by others. Because the use of CBE is relatively new, its effectiveness has not been adequately tested. Thus, the concept is of unproven value. However, since it offers the possibility of improving educational programs at a time when program accountability is being increasingly stressed, it merits the consideration of adult educators.

Competency-based education assumes that the competencies required for successful performance in a specific role or occupation can be identified, and that an education program can be conceived which will enable the participants to develop those

Hertling, James E., "Competency Based Education: Is It Applicable to Adult Education Programs?" *__Adult Leadership__, June 1974, 27-29. Copyright 1974, Adult Education Association of USA, Washington, D.C.*

competencies. Rather than awarding a certificate or degree on the basis of the number of courses taken or credit hours accumulated, satisfactory completion is based upon the demonstration of specific behaviors thought to be associated with success in a particular occupation. Students are held accountable for attaining an acceptable level of competence. They are evaluated on the basis of what they can do rather than upon what they know or say they will do when faced with the need to perform a specific task. All teaching and learning activities are related to the development of specific competencies, and anything not related to the achievement of these objectives has no valid claim for inclusion in a CBE program.

CBE is in part a response to the demands for accountability, relevance, and cost-benefit analysis. The increased emphasis being placed upon performance objectives, evaluation of student outcomes and individualized instruction have also contributed to its development and use. Adult education programs, such as those designed to train union leaders, firefighters and teacher aides, are based upon the premise that courses and programs of study will enhance the performance of participants. This can't be determined unless the competencies required for successful performance are identified and defined. Thus, if adult education programs are to be accountable, relevant and meet the test of cost-benefit analysis, program administrators must be able to demonstrate that the desired learning has occurred. This implies that program objectives must be defined with a great deal more specificity than has been the case in the past. This also suggests that the role of the instructor be changed from one of dispensing content related to broadly, and sometimes vaguely, stated objectives to one of examining the relationship between content and competency objectives, relating the teaching to the objectives, and ascertaining the validity of the objectives.

Developing and implementing a competency-based education program requires: 1) identification of the knowledge and behaviors (competencies) related to successful performance; 2) preparation for the attainment of these specific competencies through the selection of appropriate program content, instructional strategies, and instructional materials; 3) the use of appropriate criterion-referenced evaluative techniques to assess the extent to which the identified competencies have been obtained; and 4) validation studies to determine the extent to which competencies acquired to specific levels of mastery are associated with successful performance.[1]

Favorable Aspects

Why should adult educators consider the use of the competency-based education concept? The positive attributes of CBE include:

1) Placing emphasis on the development of specific competencies gives educational programs a greater sense of direction. It provides participants with concrete goals toward which to work and lets them know what is expected of them. The plan provides participants with a basis for self-assessment and they gain confidence as they develop new competencies.
2) Participants typically perceive CBE programs as being more relevant than conventionally conceived programs because of the emphasis placed upon the competencies actually required for successful occupational performance.
3) Instruction may be individualized by permitting participants to develop competencies at their own pace. Also, participants may be given tests to determine the specific competencies which they have already acquired, thereby enabling them to concentrate their efforts in those areas where they lack competence.
4) Clearly defining program objectives assists teachers in the selection of program content, instructional materials and teaching strategies; it also facilitates the measurement of participant proficiency.
5) The use of CBE enables program administrators to demonstrate accountability and illustrate the relationship between costs and benefits.

Concerns

What are some of the areas of concern that adult educators should consider before using a competency-based education approach? The following are problems commonly associated with the CBE concept:

1) Because of the multitude of variables related to successful performance in a particular occupation, it may be difficult to identify and define the competencies associated with success.
2) Even if the competencies thought to be related to successful performance can be identified, there is no assurance that the persons who acquire them will actually be successful on the job. The sum of the parts may not equal the whole.
3) The true level of an individual's competence may be difficult to assess because valid and reliable evaluative instruments have not been developed to measure certain types of competencies.
4) Freedom of student choice may be constrained because program content is carefully specified. Thus, CBE programs may prove to be dehumanizing and mechanistic.
5) Primary emphasis may be placed on cognitive and psychomotor objectives rather than affective objectives since the former are easier to specify and evaluate.
6) Participants completing a program may be merely labeled proficient with no distinction between degrees of proficiency. The time required to attain the competencies may be the only indicator of individual differences.
7) The cost of developing and implementing a CBE program may be prohibitive.

Program Examples

As indicated earlier, competency-based education programs have most frequently been used in pre-service teacher education programs. However, the concept is applicable to virtually any type of pre-service or in-service educational program.

Mt. Hood Community College uses a competency-based education approach in a work study program to prepare social workers, counselors and corrections officers.[2]

The State of North Carolina has adopted a competency-based approach for preparing and up-grading driver education teachers. Certification is based upon the achievement of 21 basic competencies rather than upon the completion of a one, two credit hour course. Teachers previously certified will also be expected to demonstrate mastery of the same 21 competencies. Three cooperating universities in North Carolina are designing a program to assist present teachers in attaining any certification competencies which they have not previously mastered.[3]

The University of Bridgeport has developed a competency-based program for the in-service education of elementary teachers. The competencies or performance objectives to be achieved are based upon a diagnosis of individual teacher needs which are determined by analyzing individual teaching performance and by examining local school instructional program priorities. Preliminary evaluation data indicates that eliminating the course credit system in favor of a competency-based format has enhanced the participants' awareness of their competencies as teachers.[4]

Summary and Conclusions

The competency-based education concept is presently in an embryonic state. A major research effort is required to determine its effectiveness as a method of educating adult learners. If competency-based education programs are to be successfully implemented, the desired competencies must be identified, instructional programs must be designed, instructional materials must be developed, methods of evaluation must be devised, and a system must be conceived for monitoring the flow of participants through the program. This is an extremely challenging task. However, because of the need to constantly strive for the improvement of adult education programs, it deserves consideration.

It appears that the application of the CBE concept to all forms and all levels of education will grow rapidly in the next few years. For example, all new programs for the preparation of teachers or administrators in New York State must now be competency-based. Various occupational groups are moving toward competency-based certification programs. If adult educators are to meet the needs of these groups, they must be familiar with the CBE concept. Because the concept is being widely used throughout the country, adult educators will have the opportunity of benefitting from the experience of others. A National Commission on Performance (competency) Based Education has been established by the Educational Testing Service to facilitate the effectiveness of CBE programs. Although primarily concerned with teacher education programs, the Commission will collect data about competency-based education programs in all fields.

NOTES

[1] Benjamin Rosner and Patricia M. Kay, "Will the Promise of C/PBTE be Fulfilled?" Phi Delta Kappan, Volume LV, No. 5, January, 1974, p. 292.

[2] Jack Magarrell, "New Competency-Based Education Plans Let Students Find Own Way to Goals," The Chronicle of Higher Education, Volume VIII, No. 24, March 18, 1974, p. 3.

[3] Stanley M. Elam, Editor, "Competency-Based Program for Driver Education in North Carolina, " Phi Delta Kappan, Volume LV, No. 5, January, 1974, p. 362.

[4] Joseph Keilty and Robert Kranyik, "The MAP: An Experiment in Individualized Inservice Education for Teachers," Journal of Continuing Education and Training, Volume 3, No. 1, June, 1973, pp 1-14.

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WHAT APL IS -- AND IS NOT

By

Waynne B. James
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I TAUGHT THEM ALL

> I have taught in high school for ten years. During that time I have given assignments, among others, to a murderer, a pugilist, a thief and an imbecile. The murderer was a quiet little boy who sat on the front seat and regarded me with pale blue eyes; the pugilist lounged by the window and let loose at intervals in a raucous laugh that startled even the geraniums; the thief was a gay-hearted Lothario with a song on his lips; and the imbecile, a shifty-eyed little animal seeking the shadows.
>
> The murderer awaits death in the state penetentiary; the pugilist lost an eye in a brawl in Hong Kong; the thief, by standing on tip-toe, can see the window of my room from the county jail; and the once gentle-eyed little moron beats his head against a padded wall in the state asylum.
>
> All these pupils once sat in my room, sat and looked at me gravely across worn brown desks. I must have been a great help to those pupils...I taught them the rhyming scheme of the Elizabethan sonnet and how to diagram a complex sentence.
>
> Naomi White
> Progressive Education
> November 1943

Although the preceding passage was written thirty-four years ago, its message is as appropriate today as it was then. In fact, it could be said to exemplify the movement in adult education to relevant, practical curricula as espoused by the Adult Performance Level (APL) Project.

APL is being hailed as one of the greatest developments in education in years, but it is not without its opponents. Both sides of the issue are explored -- the pros and cons of APL, its strengths and its limitations.

The Adult Performance Level Project, funded by the U.S. Office of Education in 1971, sought to identify the skills necessary for an adult to function successfully in today's society (The Adult Performance Level Study, 1973). The project accomplished

17

several major tasks. First it defined functional literacy in terms of five knowledge areas and four basic skill areas. The skills are taught and mastered as they apply to the knowledge areas, a relationship illustrated by the matrix below.

TABLE I

"AN APL MATRIX"

KNOWLEDGE AREAS

BASIC SKILLS	Occupational Knowledge	Consumer Knowledge	Health	Government & Law	Community Resources
Communication Skills					
Computation					
Problem-Solving					
Interpersonal Relationships					

The Project also demonstrated that large number of adults lack the competencies which are indicative of functional literacy as defined by the project. Finally, it developed a design for a curriculum to help adults acquire functional literacy. Each of the five knowledge areas begins with a general goal statement which is defined by a series of objectives (65 in all). These objectives are described by a series of sub-objectives and tasks which comprise the entire APL curriculum.

Among the strengths of the APL approach are its underlying assumptions which stress the value of relevancy, practicality, applicability, and immediacy. These assumptions are as follows (Adult Functional Competency: A Summary, 1975):

1) Competency is a relative concept which applies to a specific cultural and societal context. A person may be competent in one society at one point in time, yet

be incompetent in another society or in the same society at a different time.

2) The ability to apply a set of skills to specified knowledge areas is the primary task for the APL student. The mere knowledge of information or facts does not assure the ability to function in today's society. Being skilled within the context defined knowledge areas constitutes competency.

3) Competency is not only determined by the application of basic skills to the general knowledge areas but also by the demands of society. A competent adult, then, is one who can apply skills to the knowledge areas that are vital to the society and the time in which he must operate.

4) An individual's success is directly related to his level of competency. The ability to function adequately in one's society is viewed as an indicator of success. The person who can operate in a given context is usually the one who can manipulate available resources to insure his survival in that society.

The limitations of the APL project seem to lie both in the immensity of its scope and in certain, perhaps inevitable, failures in finding practical ways to working out the assumptions that constitute its strength. The research that generated the sixty-five APL competencies was conducted by human beings and is therefore subject to human frailties.

One such failure, perhaps, is that of making over-extravagant claims for the program. Who can say, for example, that the sixty-five skills are all-inclusive? The developers may indeed be correct in saying that competency is relative to a societal context, but can they rightly claim that the sixty-five competencies they have defined really include all the skills needed for competence in the USA in the mid-1970's? It seems appropriate to argue that there is nothing sacred about these identified competencies.

Another limitation of the APL project may be the overwhelming amount of informatio it encompasses. The objectives are so detailed and complete that the student may feel threatened or discouraged by them. It may seem to him that an unnecessarily high degree of proficiency in a staggering number of areas is being required of him when he only wants to learn how to function reasonably well in his own situation.

One of the major limitations is APL's need for perpetual revision. Although the developers state that competence is defined within a certain context at a given point in time and that competence changes with time, they have identified a set of competencies for a particular period of time (Adult Functional Competency: A Summary, 1975, p.2). Considerable money has been expended to create the APL goals, competencies, tasks, materials, etc., which, by the very definition of the project, will quickly become outdated. Will the inclination to let something settle once it is printed in black and white triumph, or will time and money be allocated to revise APL as time progresses? A strong commitment to revision and updating is necessary to prevent APL from becoming totally useless in the future.

It might be argued that the APL project, in presuming that an adult ought to possess the skills necessary for success in a white middle class society, is demonstrating prejudice. The United States is basically a white, middle class Protestant society, and in spite of legitimate concern about forcing one's values on others, the APL concept assumes that any adult who wants to function successfully in our society must learn the competencies related to that society.

A related limitation arises from the failure to allow for role versatility within the APL framework. All individuals must demonstrate the same life skills regardless of their personal situations. For example, does the small farmer who owns his own farm and will never receive a paycheck and the accompanying statement? Or, does someone who does not have, and never intends to have, children need to know how to be an effective parent? Or compare an individual living in New York City with someone living in Austin, Texas. The New Yorker may never own a car, yet one of the APL competencies deals with selecting and caring for an automobile. That same New Yorker has to know how to ride a subway, but the Texan may never see one in his life. It is clear, then, that not all of the competencies are applicable to all individuals -- yet, there are few options for individuals.

Because the APL concept is an attempt to present a practical approach to a competency-based education (CBE) program, it has many strengths and weaknesses in common with CBE endeavors. Some of the advantages associated with all CBE programs are:

1) They are individualized. A person is able to "test out" or demonstrate that he already knows an area, and thus to avoid unnecessary or redundant training.

2) They provide a communication network. Students know what to expect as well as where they are and how well they are doing.

3) Assessment is measurable. Students can see the tangible results of their efforts.

4) Students are recycleable. There is no "failing." Students can be given as many chances as they need to develop mastery of an area.

5) Ideally, CBE programs provide alternatives for the achievement of a goal. Students have more than one way to attain competence and they can choose among various methods or routes to achieve their goals.

Some of the problems APL has in common with all CBE Programs are:

1) It is time-consuming from the perspective of both developers and students. Not only does it take considerable time to identify competencies, it also takes time to create curricula, materials, etc., appropriate to those competencies. Furthermore, students are unable to master the required skills overnight.

2) Competency-based programs are expensive. The initial development of such programs demands sizeable financial support, and requires continued expenditures to perpetuate a CBE system once it is established.

3) Extensive records must be maintained. Complete records are necessary to prevent losing even one individual in the complexities of the system. Progress reports

must be maintained constantly on each individual as well as on the over-all program.

4) More resources are needed than are required for conventional educational endeavors. Not only is human expenditure necessary for CBE programs, but extensive materials covering the range of the entire program also are vital. In a traditional classroom setting, students may be more homogeneously grouped, but in a CBE system materials for all levels of achievement must be available.

5) One frequent criticism of CBE assessment is the seemingly arbitrary nature of what constitutes "passing." Do nine out of ten correct answers show that a person is more competent than eight out of ten correct answers?

Perhaps the most valuable test of the promise or inadequacy of the APL concept lies with the users of the concept -- students, teachers and administrators. It is their reactions to their own concrete experiences of APL which will determine the success or failure of the project.

The clearly expressed APL goals and objectives can serve as a communication device which lets the students know the framework within which they will be operating. But at the same time, the extensiveness of the concept may frighten them; they might feel overwhelmed by all the information or they may see few options for themselves within the framework. They will accept APL only if they believe that APL's relevancy outweighs its rather intimidating complexity.

Teachers may experience similar conflicting emotions or situations. The APL goals and objectives may provide a framework within which they feel comfortable working. They now have some specific means of measurement rather than having to guess haphazardly about where they and their students may be going. It is something to "hang their hats on." It serves as a means of furthering communication with students. Furthermore, it can serve as a means of preparing learning activities for students. On the other hand, some teachers may need extensive retraining before they can accept and adapt the APL concept. If teachers prove to be too rigid and insist on teaching the new subject matter in the same old ways, the strengths of APL will be lost -- it could become just another useless curriculum guide.

Administrators are similarly vital to the success or failure of an APL program. If administrators fail to give full support or refuse to commit adequate personnel and resources, then the teachers and students will suffer. If the administrators treat it as merely another new subject matter, it will fail because an APL program demands full, enthusiastic backing to be successful. An administrator may need to undergo extensive retraining along with his faculty, and to provide extensive public relations -- but if he will do so, he will probably be rewarded by happy students spreading the word about a new program.

The final category of individuals connected with APL are the developers. Although the initial work was done at the University of Texas, many states are now developing curricula and materials for their own APL programs. If the developers do not violate the underlying assumptions of the APL concept, the materials that are created will enhance the program. If, however, the basic APL assumptions are ignored by developers or publishers it could be disasterous for APL. For example, if curriculum developers write materials which strongly reflect their own specializations at the expense of a wider knowledge base, they will produce materials that are too limited to serve the APL concept. If publishers are content to rest on their materials once printed, without revising them continuously, the whole idea behind APL will be violated and the unchanging materials will destroy the APL while it is still young. If the test developers persist in utilizing paper-and-pencil multiple choice items which do not provide the best indication of competence -- then the entire program will be doomed. Everyone who participates in the creation or revision of various aspects of the APL concept must take into consideration its philosophy and underlying assumptions. If those who are developing the specific programs for implementing the APL violate its basic concepts, they will unintentionally trigger the down fall of the entire APL idea, and it could become just another fad that was here for awhile but quickly forgotten.

The fate of the APL, then, will be determined by its users and developers. If APL is to be successful, it is up to them to maximize its strengths and minimize its limitations. The response of each group we have examined will determine the degree of success or failure of the entire venture -- and that is perhaps both the greatest strength and the most serious weakness of APL.

Whether or not the sixty-five competencies are viewed as the absolute truth, the greatest gifts the APL project can give to education are a model and a methodology. The model that APL presents is a departure from the traditional approach to learning academic skills. It stresses the relevancy of acquiring literacy through learning practical skills oriented to daily life. It is easier for the student to learn both academic and non-academic skills when their usefulness for ordinary tasks is clear. The APL methodology involves providing a functional, performance-based approach in which teachers no longer teach subjects in isolation from the student's daily experience; rather, they teach those competencies necessary to function successfully in today's rapidly changing society. These competencies are neither learned nor assessed by the traditional methods in which the teacher dispenses information the assimilation of which can later be checked with a paper and pencil test. The basic concept of APL also suggests that both the practitioners and the students need to be able to adjust to the process of continuous change in our society.

Though no one called it APL, certainly the idea of teaching life coping skills is not new. Teachers have been doing that for years, but never before has such an intensive study of this kind of education been attempted. Rather than merely criticizing the three R's of public schools, the APL study presents a concrete alternative to the traditional definitions of literacy and competency. The ultimate value of the APL project is that it puts a handle on coping skills and provides a framework within which to work. It may not be a panacea or 100% "correct" in every particular, but it is certainly much better than teaching Elizabethan sonnets to future morons, murderers and thieves.

COMPETENCY BASED EDUCATION:
A BANDWAGON IN SEARCH OF A DEFINITION [1]

By

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In September, 1972, the Oregon State Board of Education passed new minimum graduation requirements for students entering ninth grade in the Fall of 1974 and new minimum standards for local school districts focused on the new requirements in 1974. The thrust of these new requirements and standards involved the introduction of three domains of "survival level" competencies as minimum conditions for high school graduation by 1978: personal development, social responsibility, and career development. In addition to "passing" a normal complement of high school courses, students will be obligated to master locally determined minimum standards in these three "competency" areas before receiving a diploma. School districts are required to facilitate students' progress in these areas by providing adequate mechanisms for needs assessment, goal setting, instruction, evaluation, and record keeping.[2]

Underlying the Oregon action were two years of public hearings that explored the alleged inability of prevailing school curricula, practices, and standards to assure that youngsters completing twelve years of formal education could survive economically and socially as independent young adults. Implicit in the Oregon discussions was a challenge to the validity of using time and course credits as bases for certifying student accomplishment and the relevance of current curricula to the life-role demands youngsters would face after leaving school. Similar concerns have, of course, been voiced in most other states.

Although largely unintended and unanticipated by those involved the 1972 Oregon regulations provided the first significant nudge that set in motion across the

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national over the next four years a series of actions by state level policy makers and administrators to consider, formulate and implement regulations and procedures that they now associate with the term Competency Based Education (CBE). With over twenty states currently considering or implementing a range of "CBE" schemes for their elementary or secondary schools, this uncoordinated movement is rapidly transforming into a bandwagon that promises to be the Great American Educational Fad of the 1970's.[3] And like most self-respecting fads in American education over the past few decades, this CBE bandwagon cannot be accused of having put its conceptual house in order before launching on its uncharted parade route and accumulating a vast and lively following. Aside from universal beliefs in the desirability of school system accountability and student "competence," the adherents and practitioners of current elementary and secondary school CBE efforts are marching (or parading) in different uniforms to different drummers playing different tunes.[4] Basic definitions, conceptual clarity, and analyses of the organizational and social implications of various CBE approaches are badly needed.

Toward an Operational Definition of CBE

According to Hathaway (1976) our current conceptions of (and confusion about) Competency Based Education have emerged from two distinctive approaches to defining and labelling the phenomenon. The *descriptive* method, pursued by authors such as Schmieder (1974) and Trivett (1975), examines programs that describe themselves as Competency Based and seeks to discover the elements they share in common. The enumeration of those common elements serves as the definition of CBE in *practice*.

The work of Glick, Henning, and Johnson (1975) and of Howsam (1972) represents the *a priori* or *prescriptive* approach, which takes a set of meanings or conditions as given and derives a definition of the phenomenon from them. This leads to a *theoretical* definition of CBE which serves as a criterion or reference against which practice can be measured.

The analysis that follows is largely *prescriptive* in character and substantially reflects the consensus of a number of acknowledged experts in the field as to the theoretical constructs implied in CBE and the characteristics that differentiate it from associated practices such as competency based teacher education, mastery learning, individualized instruction, and applied performance-based testing.[5] It is offered 1) as a way of providing greater conceptual clarity to the meaning of CBE than is currently present, 2) as a framework against which the multiplicity of statewide endeavors can be examined and identified, and 3) as a set of elements whose political, sociological, and educational implications need to be carefully scrutinized. To the extent that bias and advocacy are evident in the analysis, they are loaded in a direction supporting a vision of students as active agents in the educational process, not as passive recipients of society's concern with their accountability, custody, socialization, or training.

Stated briefly, this analysis treats CBE as: *a data-based, adaptive, performance-oriented set of integrated processes that facilitate, measure, record and certify within the context of flexible time parameters the demonstration of known, explicity stated, and agreed upon learning outcomes that reflect successful functioning in life roles.* Within this intensely compacted but elaborate definition are six critical elements that require special delineation and discussion. They are: outcomes, time, instruction, measurement, certification and program adaptability. Taken together, the analysis of these six elements offered below constitutes a description of an elaborate and full-blown CBE program -- one whose adequacy and mission extend beyond the prevalent and narrow demands for minimum student basic skill proficiencies.

Yet it is useful to note how these six elements relate to and expand upon what could be considered the four *absolute minimum* defining characteristics of CBE in its most basic and rudimentary form. These four features are imbedded in a school system's certification and opportunity structures.

Outcomes

Perhaps the most fundamental aspect of the extended definition of CBE involves the concept of *competency*. While admittedly a stringent condition to impose on school systems accustomed to conducting most of their instruction and evaluation in closed classrooms with textbooks and paper-pencil tests, the definition of a competency used here renders the concept of *life-roles* and their attendant activities as the prime movers in framing outcome goals, designing curricula, providing instruction, and measuring student performance. This approach, therefore, defines *competencies* as indicators of successful performance in life-role activities (be they producer, consumer, political citizen, driver, family member, intimate friend, recreational participant, or life-long learner) and distinguishes them from the discrete cognitive, manual, and social *capacities* such as reading and computational skills, speaking ability, and motivation) that, when integrated and adopted to particular social contexts, serve as the *enablers* or *building blocks* on which competencies ultimately depend. There are, of course, also important capacities such as sensitivity, awareness, and the appreciation of beauty which may serve as valuable *enrichers* of experience in roles that are more intrinsically referenced and that do not necessarily imply mastery or success in relation to externally-referenced standards.[6] However, it is the enabler rather than enricher conception of capacities that guides most statewide policy demands for the demonstration of student proficiencies, even though neither deals explicitly with the exigencies of real life-role demands.

Hence, the first fundamental decision that policy makers must confront when dealing with CBE is whether the letter C stands for Competency, which implies the framing of outcome goals in applied life-role terms and making major changes in curricula, instruction, and evaluation procedures, or for Capacity, which frames outcome goals in terms of discrete, more narrowly focused abilities and implies fewer changes in the existing curriculum.[7]

Given that such a determination is made, the foregoing definition implies that the outcome goals of a CBE process be stated in terms that are clear and explicit with regard to the criteria of performance that are expected and that they be known and agreed upon by all those with a direct interest in the student's educational progress. In other words CBE takes the surprises out of the instructional-certification process by encouraging collaborative decision making regarding goals, by placing these goals "up front" as guides for both teachers and learners, and by attaching those goals to explicit and reasonably concrete behavioral referents.

The certification structure of a system defines the standards and framework for assessing, recording, and crediting the experience and accomplishments of students for program placement, promotion, and graduation purposes. In order for CBE to be present at all, the bases for determining credit must: 1) be reflected in clear and specific criterion-referenced outcome statements that are 2) directly embodied in the instruction and evaluation of students and 3) known by them prior to their engagement in a given arena of work. In short, the measurement and certification of success in a CBE program occur when students accomplish known and clear criterion-based standards 4) in the context of an opportunity structure that allows for multiple exposures to both instruction and evaluation if necessary. Mechanisms that allow students to recycle through both instructional and assessment experiences without undue delay or penalty are essential to CBE.

This means, then, that the kinds of outcomes to be pursued, the decision-making processes for determining and pursuing them, the range of options available to students in terms of instructional and evaluation agents, means, and settings all constitute inherent program variations that extend and embellish the four essential features of CBE. These important elements in more fully elaborated conceptions of CBE are discussed below.

While the danger exists that such a goal-directed approach might leave no room for flexibility, spontaneity, or individuality for either teachers or students, there is no inherent need (as distinct from tendency) for CBE to be deterministic. The crux of this problem lies in two areas: the linkage between goals and formal certification requirements and the variety of instructional approaches and evaluation means available for facilitating and measuring goal attainment. CBE certification requirements can build upon both competency and capacity definitions of outcomes and allow for electives and options in much the same way as traditional course-credit system do. In addition, a variety of means can be used to facilitate success in a given outcome area. If properly conceived, CBE programs need not be rigid, mechanistic, and monolithic.

Time

One critical factor in this definition of CBE that inherently implies flexibility and encourages individualization is time. In this respect, time in a CBE framework operates similarly to Carroll's (1963) formulation which serves as the basis of what Block (1970 and 1974) and others refer to as Mastery Learning (ML). Essentially, both ML and CBE emphasize the primacy of the outcome goal as the fundamental concern of the educational enterprise and treat time and opportunity as elements that serve those goals. This requires that time be used flexibly in terms of when, how long, and how often opportunities for both instruction and evaluation are provided. Single opportunities for evaluation and instruction determined within reasonably fixed time parameters have strong and inherent selection biases that serve to emphasize differences among students in relation to often variable standards. This runs counter to the ML and CBE emphases on getting students to reach definite goals, even if more (or less) time than "normal" or more than one instruction-evaluation opportunity is required.

Given the major shifts in the application of time and definition of standards just discussed, CBE seems to call into question three fundamental bases of traditional school organization and practice: 1) the meaning and validity of semesters, quarters, and class periods as bases for organizing instruction and conducting evaluation for certification purposes; 2) the meaning of a course -- which typically consists of as much content as an instructor can fit into a given number of class periods for most students within a given quarter or semester; and 3) grading practices that reflect comparisons across students, within semesters, and across teachers and classrooms without a criterion base as a standard. In light of these points, the shift implied by CBE from time-based to outcome-based principles for school organization presents challenges to established and time-honored practices that may be difficult if not impossible to accommodate.

Instruction

The role of instruction in CBE is central to the attainment of the outcome goals that guide its purposes. CBE does not consist of evaluation and certification systems alone but depends on the instructional system to facilitate all students' opportunities for meeting certification standards. In order to promote attainment of these standards, CBE schools should deliberately employ instructional means that are known, explicit, agreed upon, readily available, and closely tied to recognized outcome goals.

Note that the close articulation of goals and means does not proscribe flexibility and choice among the range of experiences and activities that might promote success in a given area. Instead schools can provide a variety of instructional activities from which students can choose in pursuing a given outcome goal.

Nonetheless the choice of goals may have a major impact on established instructional practices, particularly when life-role competencies imply exposure and activities that are either inadequately provided by or poorly simulated in classroom or formal school contexts and when teaching staffs may lack the competence or versatility to facilitate certain goals. Essentially the more closely outcome goals reflect competencies that require problem solving, personal initiative, and social skills in connection with life-roles that are broader than those of student, worker, or consumer, the greater is the need to expand the instructional program beyond the walls of the school and to tap as instructors resource specialists outside the formal school staff.

Measurement

Although the choice of CBE outcome goals may impose major constraints and demands on school systems with respect to reconceptualizing, redesigning, and providing adequate curriculum and instruction, the problems are minor compared to those related to the reliable, valid, and timely measurement of applied role performance. The technology surrounding the assessment and measurement of success in life role activities is only in its infancy, even though the rush toward adopting CBE-like programs is upon us.[8] Those systems seriously concerned with the quality of data they will accept as evidence of competency performance will have to pay a steep price in time and personnel resources required for the task.

Allowing, however, that these technical obstacles to adequate measurement can somehow be surmounted, administrators of CBE programs will still face major difficulties in implementing a responsive system of evaluation. First, the fundamental groundrules involving the role of student evaluation in schools will have to be rethought and adapted to the framework of CBE criteria discussed above. This means, for example, that both the criteria for student performance and the particular means of measuring them need to be explicit, known, agreed upon, and criterion-referenced. When accompanied by a record keeping system calibrated around specific outcome goals, these two things fundamentally undermine the potential use of evaluation (testing and grades) as a mechanism for the control of student behavior by specifying in advance the criteria and evidence that can be used in assigning grades and making placement decisions. The use of assignments or tests as surprises or threats is dramatically reduced when multiple opportunities for both instruction and evaluation are allowed and when the expectations for performance are clear and known by students in advance. Clearly, CBE reduces the discretion of individual teachers in determining both the criteria to be used in evaluation and the uses to which the latter can be put.[9]

A second additional obstacle to implementing a CBE measurement system has to do with the complexity of coordinating a multiple-opportunity system of instruction and evaluation. The more frequently opportunities for evaluation are provided, the more complex will be the tasks of coordinating and assigning students to appropriate instructional experiences based on these results. This is likely to stimulate pressures for routinization of these tasks as a matter of practical survival, despite the inherent flexibility implied by the CBE concept.[10]

Certification

If there is any element in this basic definition of CBE that is unique to the concept, it is that the verified demonstration of competencies constitutes the *exclusive* criterion for student success, program placement, certification, and graduation. This means simply that when other criteria such as attendance and other means of compiling "credit" are used as bases for record keeping and determining graduation status, then a program is not fully competency-based. In fact, such is the case in Oregon where districts have the option -- but are not required -- to waive normal attendance requirements and students must compile 21 course credits in order to graduate, whether those credits are earned through competency demonstration or not.

Note, however, that the reverse of this proposition also holds; that is, just because a program demands demonstration of some kind of proficiency as a criterion for exit (i.e., C-Based *Certification)* or periodically administers criterion-referenced tests to its students for diagnostic purposes (i.e., C-Based *Measurement)* does not mean that a fully integrated C-Based *Instruction* program is also present.

While each may exist in some programs independently of the others, C-Based *Education* occurs only when CBI, CBM, and CBC are simultaneously present and closely integrated around specified outcome goals.

Three items deserve special emphasis at this point. One, there is an obvious need for a more precise and standardized language system that reflects the diverse approaches to employing "CBE-type" programs and practices in school systems. Distinguishing among competencies, capacities, kinds of life-roles, instruction, measurement, and certification is only a first step in this process.

Two, when student certification is truly either Competency or Capacity Based, the meaning and utility of student attendance fundamentally changes. Where, when, how long, and with whom students engage in the activities that facilitate their learning and development are of less moment in a CBE context than is their ultimate responsibility for reaching given outcome goals. This implies that a major shift in student-school relationships may occur under CBE arrangements; that is, schools can become less preoccupied with the formal custody and control of students as the latter will be compelled to assume more authentic responsibility for their own learning and ultimate accomplishments. With CBE, graduation is no longer a matter of hanging around for 12 years and staying out of trouble.[11]

Three, the basic tension in a CBE certification structure between "required minimums" and "desirable maximums" is probably unavoidable. Inherent in any certification process is the establishment of a performance floor which students must meet in order to receive institutional endorsement. But where exit rules allow one to receive a diploma once those minimums are met, the minimums may also serve as the maximums, and many students may choose to leave as soon as possible. This issue is particularly troublesome for institutions of higher education that are accustomed to demanding more than minimums as admissions criteria, even though traditional letter-grade course-credit systems have provided little solid indication

35

of what a student's actual performance capabilities are in any given area. It is likely, therefore, both that the outcome goals required for graduation in CBE systems will eventually emerge from a tense compromise among the many constituencies in a community regarding the necessary, the desirable and the possible, and that C-Based diplomas will be viewed with initial if not undying skepticism by colleges and universities.

Program Adaptability

The final element in the definition of CBE concerns the central role of student performance data in the management and evaluation of all elements in the system. The major assumption underlying this proposition is that students' performance in relation to outcome goals may be a reflection not only of their ability and endeavor but of the adequacy and appropriateness of the instruction provided, the evaluation tools used, or the goals themselves. Its corollary is that a CBE system is never finally and officially "in place and permanent" but must remain constantly sensitive to the need to change indicators, procedures, or settings in the face of evidence that student progress is faltering.

In short, CBE programs require mechanisms that collect and use student performance data as the basis for diagnosing weaknesses and necessary remediation not only for students but for themselves as well. It is here, then, that the delicate balance between student and system accountability is most apparent and the ultimate vitality of a system will be reflected.[12]

The Status of
State CBE Efforts

The foregoing discussion leaves little doubt concerning the scope and magnitude of changes in school system procedures that are implied by the implementation of a "full-blown" CBE program. Upon reflection it is also apparent that this conception of CBE satisfies the five conditions implied in the concept of an educational reform (Stout and Spady, 1976) i.e., that major changes are required in 1) the structure and allocation of system resources, 2) what is learned and mastered by students, 3) the distribution of power and decision-making among the constituencies connected with the system, 4) the nature and relations among the basic functions of the system, and 5) the patterns of access to and outcomes of schooling.

Realistically, however, this conception of CBE will be extremely difficult to implement even if state legislatures were to mandate it word for word, since neither current funding provisions nor the orientations of practitioners seem conducive to undertaking such sweeping reforms. Therefore, it is no surprise to find that almost all state efforts in this direction appear far more limited in conception and scope. According to information compiled by Clark and Thompson (1976), no states outside of Oregon appear to use language consistent with a life-role conception of competency in either their current or pending regulations pertaining to mandated student proficiencies. The possible exceptions refer to the need for occupational and consumer mathematics skills. However, within the next year New York and Pennsylvania may make more decisive moves toward implementing approaches to schooling more fully resembling this conception of CBE.

Almost all other states are concerned either with capacity-based outcomes in limited basic skill areas (e.g., Arizona, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Louisiana, Maryland, Nebraska, and Tennessee), a slightly broader set of subject area proficiences (e.g., California, Texas, Virginia, and Washington, DC), or as-yet-undefined or else locally determined options concerned with some kind of minimum proficiency requirements (e.g., Colorado, Kansas, Michigan, and New Jersey). As of October 1976, in only two cases, California and Florida, could students leave school in less than twelve years with a diploma once they passed a state-determined proficiency exam (the Oregon regulations allow local districts to determine whether early graduation will be allowed), and in only eight states (California, Colorado, Georgia, Nebraska, New Jersey, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Virginia) do either current or pending regulations seem to suggest that some kind of instructional experiences need to be provided students to facilitate their performance in desired outcome areas. This is not to say, however, that these states endorse a fully integrated goals-instruction-evaluation-certification approach to schooling; in most cases the policy language merely assumes that instructional support should accompany evaluation demands.

Aside from Oregon, five states, California, Maryland,[13] Michigan, New York, and Pennsylvania deserve particular attention over the next few years as sites where current thinking about substantial proficiency or competency-based reforms suggests real promise.

California is just beginning its second attempt to pass legislation that enacts several provisions of a 1975 Commission Report on the Reform of Intermediate and Secondary Education (RISE). Included in the RISE legislation is a provision that the reform plans of local districts include mechanisms that assure student promotion and program placement on the basis of demonstrated proficiencies. Although the 1976 RISE legislation was vetoed by the governor after passing the state legislature, it is expected to be reintroduced in the 1977 legislative session. In its place, however, the legislature did enact a far less expansive and expensive bill authorizing the creation by 1978 of proficiency standards that must include, but not necessarily be limited to, reading comprehension, writing, and computational skills.

Michigan, on the other hand, has no state legislation supporting CBE but a climate that has allowed a number of districts to experiment with criterion-based, open-time instructional and certification systems. These efforts are expected to continue and expand.

During the 1976-77 academic year the New York State Department of Education will be working closely with interested districts in shaping proposals and plans for the implementation of alternative models of CBE. This gradualist approach to working through some of the difficulties associated with CBE implementation on a pilot basis may prove highly profitable in the long run for those districts committed to substantial system changes, but as yet no specific outcome goals have been selected by interested districts.

Pennsylvania, in a fourth case, has been exploring a concept of system reform with a definite Competency Based orientation. Originally called Community Learning and currently named "Project 81," this program would be centered around facilitating student capacities and competencies in five major areas of activity, with a stress on particpation outside the school building where appropriate. The areas include a broad range of basic skills, the worlds of work and leisure, community governance and involvement, and a broad range of citizen and personal survival skills. Initial implementation would proceed along participatory lines similar to those in New York State.

Overall, then, there is considerable evidence that states are jumping on a CBE-like bandwagon under the assumption that toughening certification standards for students will satisfy the public's need for school system accountability. What most of these new policy adoptions seem to overlook is the fact that improving the social utility of student outputs may require a reconsideration of the kinds of goals around which the instructional program is built and the structures and mechanism it creates to achieve them.

NOTES

[1] I am deeply indebted to Michael Cohen, H. Del Schalock, and Walter E. Hathaway for insights that have contributed significantly to this paper, and to Billie A. Norris for expert assistance in the preparation of the manuscript.

[2] The original 1974 Oregon standards allowed for a bienniel review by the State Board of Education and appeared under the title *Minimum Standards for Oregon Public Schools:* December, 1974. The recently revised standards are available under the title *Oregon Administrative Rules (Minimum Standards):* June 1976. Except for changes in compliance dates, the substance of the two documents is very similar.

[3] Although this current movement has been influenced by many of the concepts and approaches used in the widespread adoption of Competency Based Teacher Education in the early Seventies, it is distinctively concerned with the achievements of elementary and secondary school students. Evidence of the interest in mandating and measuring "minimal competencies" was reflected in a March, 1976, conference sponsored by the National Assessment of Educational Progress in Denver, attended by a surprising 125 participants from 32 states.

[4] This diversity of conceptions and approaches is apparent not only from the various state regulations described by Clark and Thompson (1976) but also by the presentations of several states at a July, 1976, conference on "Educational Reform: The Role of Competency Based Education" sponsored by the Study Commission of the Council of Chief State School Officers.

[5] Those experts who contributed most significantly to the definition of CBE used in this paper are Thomas Corcoran, formerly at the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education, and currently at the New Jersey State Department of Education; Mary Hall, Oregon State Department of Education; Walter Hathaway and Steven Murray, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory; Richard Hersh, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education; Ruth Nickse, Syracuse University Research Corporation; H. Del Schalock, Teaching Research, Oregon College of Education; and Gary Woditsch, Bowling Green University.

[6] Broadening the concept of capacities to include "enrichers" as well as "enablers" begins to take into account the concerns of many teachers and critics that CBE lends itself too readily to the pursuit of a narrow set of outcome objectives and a mechanistic approach to instruction.

[7] The difficulty educators seem to have with a definition of competencies based on conceptions of life-roles is reflected in typical lists of "life-role competencies" that presumably underlie many school courses. The wording of these outcome goals resembles "capacities" far more than "competencies."

[8] Although the National Assessment of Educational Progress has been developing applied performance measurement devices for a number of years, the consensus from its March, 1976, conference on applied competency testing was that adequate instrumentation to serve expressed state needs may still be years off.

[9] These issues are examined in greater detail in a paper by Spady (1976) entitled, "Power, Legitimacy, and the Process of Evaluation."

[10] Another option that arises in light of increased complexity of evaluation under CBE is the possibility that staff evaluation specialists may emerge who assume primary responsibility for measuring student outcomes. The role of teacher would itself become more specialized around instructional activities as a result.

[11] Some of these issues are framed more explicity in the context of the multiple functions of the school in a paper by Spady (1975) entitled "Competency Based Education as a Framework for Analyzing School Reform."

[12] A more elaborate and adequate treatment of how various aspects of program

adaptability serve as critical *enabling characteristics* of CBAE is provided by Schalock, Spady, and Hathaway (1976).

[13] The prospects for change in this direction in Maryland rest largely on the recent appointment of a new State Superintendent of Education who, as Deputy Secretary of Education in Pennsylvania, was one of the architects of that State's Community Learning concept and program.

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COMPETENCY-BASED ADULT EDUCATION:
TOWARD A FUNCTIONAL DEFINITION

By

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INTRODUCTION

Concepts of competency-based education (CBE), by no means totally new or vastly reformist in nature, are taking on savior-like roles in the latest versions of the "Johnny-can't-do-something" assault on schooling in the United States. Numerous critics seem to find little difficulty in reporting diploma-granted high school students who cannot function; that is, read, write, compute, or find and hold jobs. It is not unusual to hear reports from post-secondary institutions of declining test scores of applicants, the needs for remediation activities, and overall poor performances on the undergraduate as well as the graduate level. In short, education or whatever it is that is thought to go on within the schools is being questioned seriously both in individual and societal terms. Many of the suggested remedies such as explicit accountability measures, functional literacy curricula and teaching, back-to-basics programming for instruction, and assorted assessment techniques have gained a certain status in recent years. This is most notable in the number of states in which a form of minimal competency law or resolution has been enacted by the legislature or state board of education.

This rather vigorous attention currently being paid to competency-developing and/or functional literacy activities for the elementary and secondary education programs underscores the need for a reconsideration of the pressing, but usually overlooked or neglected, area of adult education. Specifically, the Adult Basic Education (ABE) program authorized and funded by the federal government under the Adult Education Act, P.L. 89-750 as amended, should be targeted for this purpose because of its delivery of services through the state education agencies to public school systems, for the most part, "to expand educational opportunity and encourage the establishment of programs of adult public education that will enable all adults to continue their education to at least the level of secondary school and make available the means to secure training that will enable them to become more employable, productive and responsible citizens."

THE NATURE OF THE ABE PROGRAM

Adult Basic Education, established with the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act (1964) under Title II, Part B, operates on a commitment to lifelong learning: ABE is often the first step for many citizens. As a program addressing a broad spectrum of needs, ABE also accommodates special groups such as non-speakers of English, the rural isolated, institutionalized persons, older Americans, the handicapped, and veterans; frequently linking with other programs and agencies to improve the effectiveness of service delivery. It is a program which makes wide use of instructional options in providing learning activities in public school buildings, colleges, churches, store fronts, public housing sites, learning and resource centers, mobile units, libraries, and correctional institutions. Operating with a modest annual budget of $90 million of federal funds, perhaps that amount from state and local sources, and over 45,000 administrators, teachers, and other personnel, the ABE program serves over 1.5 million adults. As a survivor program of the War of Poverty, ABE has continued to maintain itself relatively intact in the face of changing administrations, amended legislation, impoundment of funds, and criticism from the inside as well as from the outside.

Changes in the Adult Education Act and accompanying Rules and Regulations have reflected various moods: usually toward more humanistic pursuits as exhibited by the expansion and revision of the Statement of Purpose over the years. A change which is considered significant in this regard was the shift from the authorization to enroll persons who had completed less than twelve grades of school to that of persons who were *functioning* (emphasis mine) at less than a twelfth grade level. This may be viewed as an important step in the recognition of competency as a legitimate concern of the federally supported adult education program. Although this action was regarded as a positive modification, the continued application of the grade level measure as a means of recording and reporting ABE participants; the documenting of progress in and the assessment of an individual's success, and as a method of program evaluation remains. Also debatable in terms of a program provision is the necessity for an ABE learner to amass twelve or more hours of attendance in order to be counted on the Annual Program Report as enrolled. Change does come slowly and in small increments; however, this situation may be altered drastically in the not to distant future.

In fighting to maintain its program identity and funds on almost an annual basis, Adult Basic Education practitioners and supporters have had to do more than submit program statistics for the record. They have had to report and document impact in far greater terms than required in the Annual Program Report. Adult Basic Educators have had to relate the achievement of learners in real terms: men and women gaining skills for learning and coping, experiencing the excitement of knowing, the security and well being that comes with "knowing how;" finding new meaning in family life, reading to children, participating in community affairs; responding with new self-confidence to responsibilities and opportunities, finding solutions to occupational and career questions, and addressing problems of personal growth and development. In short, ABE has clearly demonstrated itself to be an adult-oriented program capable of adjusting to the needs of many populations.

ABE, THE APL STUDY AND COMPETENCY-BASED

Local teachers and administrators, the state directors of adult education, and

others closely associated with the ABE program over the years have always been brought face-to-face with the problems of people and the exigency of mandated program rules and regulations. These problems were often disparate from the achievement of a sixth, eighth, or twelfth grade equivalency attainment, and, in more cases than not, attention was given to assisting people, individually and in groups, toward remedies and solutions. The Division of Adult Education of the United States Office of Education (DAE/USOE) was not totally unaware of this situation; that is, what people wanted and needed to learn as compared with literacy described and reported by other criteria. In 1971, USOE awarded a Section 309, Special Projects grant under the Adult Education Act to the Texas Education Agency to conduct a study of adult literacy. A major portion of the work was subcontracted, and after the first year funded directly to the University of Texas at Austin. The four-year study which followed, under the direction of Norvell Northcutt, was called the Adult Performance Level (APL) Project.

The APL study redefined adult literacy in terms of actual competencies performed in life tasks. A national assessment of the adult population was conducted to determine how well adults were able to perform the identified life tasks. The results were devastating and commended national attention by the media: approximately 20% of the total adult population of the continental United States possess less than minimal survival skills, and another 33% have less than proficient survival skills. Three levels of competency, in the APL terms, were established. These were associated with adult success as measured by income, job status, and education. This study has met with criticism from several quarters. Confusion seems to exist in relation to research methodology, the possible replacement of established programs such as the GED with APL testing, and the synonymous association of the APL with competency-based adult education (CBAE). Fear has also been expressed that the APL's objectives will become a national curriculum.

Adult Performance Level was the title of the research effort from 1971 to 1976, and now is used in reference to pilot programs in Texas and the development of competency measurement instruments at the American College Testing program. Many projects throughout the country, of course, have used the results of the APL study in the development of CBAE programs.

NATIONAL ISSUES IN CBAE

There are many people who would agree with William Griffith's characterization of adult education trends and issues as "pretty well jumbled at the moment." This condition may be caused or assisted, in part, by the current concerns for competency-based education and minimal competency testing being voiced by the educational establishment and others across the nation. Terminology such as proficiency testing, minimal standards, functional competency/literacy, basics, life and coping skills, and societal requirements abound in a rapidly growing body of literature focusing or the nature of CBE and its advantages of disadvantages. Much of this literature is, not unexpectedly, directed at the elementary and secondary education systems. Issues for post-secondary programs relate more to such areas as adult vocational education, training and development, competency-based teacher education, and continuing education systems. Issues for post-secondary programs relate more to such areas as adult vocational education, training and development, competency-based teacher education, and continuing education programs for professionals.

Adult education *per se*, more specifically the Adult Basic Education program, fares less well in terms of attention. Of course, many persons are engaged in CBE projects supported to a large extent by state ABE 309 special project grants. However, a great deal of this work is hardly ever reported or much less disseminated on a wide scale. The APL research, a cornerstone for much of the state and local ABE assessment, curriculum development, and pilot program efforts in CBAE, is still

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State legislatures and boards of education are enacting a number of laws and resolutions which are being subsumed as competency-based education. The influential Education Commission of the States reports on these actions and provides a clearinghouse type of function which includes conducting workshops on such CBE topics as minimal competency testing. At various state and local levels, groups of people are busy with CBE planning: developing lists of competencies, organizing curricula, assessing measurement methods and techniques, selecting pilot and demonstration sites, and addressing credential and certification issues. In a few states, CBE is becoming a fact of life in terms of curricula and mandatory testing. The almost thoughtless acceptance given to the ideology of carrying over any and all actions taken in and for the elementary and secondary fields to adult education seems, again, plainly in evidence. "Aye," as Hamlet would say, "there's the rub:" state actions *vis-a-vis* CBE for elementary and secondary, and adult education programs in terms of the nature and scope of the federal Adult Basic Education program. Put another way, what could happen if a state's K to 12 program is competency-based while ABE remains with grade levels?

ADULT EDUCATORS, STATE DIRECTORS, USOE, AND DELPHI

Competency-based education topics and issues are being identified and discussed on an increasing scale in national, regional, and state sponsored adult education conferences. The California Conference on Adult Competency Education in June 1977, a state and university sponsored meeting with national dimensions, brought many educators together in San Francisco to share in state-of-the-art presentations. The topics has been addressed by having presentations of a CBE nature made during the many regional adult education conferences. And, a few states that are well advanced in competency education areas, have been providing a degree of leadership in CBAE for several years: California, New York, Oregon, and Texas.

In February 1978, the Division of Adult Education of USOE convened the Workshop on Adult Competency Education in New Orleans. It was planned that during three intensive days, DAE/USOE would obtain insight and some hard data on the relationship of CBAE to the Adult Basic Education program from a selected groups of practitioners: state directors of adult education; other ranking state education department personnel; public school adult education administrators and teachers; university adult educators, and a wide variety of other educators.

During the months preceding the New Orleans Workshop, a modified Delphi study was conducted which yielded some data for developing and clarifying selected CBAE issues and planning for small group session agenda items. The Delphi technique was used because of the desire to obtain general agreement or consensus on the CBAE issues prior to the Workshop, and at the same time identify topics of concern on which consensus might be achieved during the face-to-face meetings. A simple tabulation of the results of the Delphi showed that nearly 85% of the selected CBAE issue statements achieved high to moderate consensus. The items of lowest general agreement, plus a careful review of all of the comments directed at the various Delphi statements resulted in the identification of five concerns for a more in-depth examination in small group sessions. They were: a functional definition for CBAE; determination of competency needs of adults and its impact on state planning; critical elements of state and federal legislation relating to CBAE; benefit to adult education of CBE laws or resolutions for elementary and secondary education, and possible coordination/facilitation roles for DAE/USOE in terms of CBAE.

The participants at the Workshop were divided into ten groups for the exploration of and response to the concerns raised by the Delphi data. All groups were instructed to develop a functional definition of CBAE, and to select any other three of the remaining four concerns to examine in depth. The task for each group was to discuss the question, prepare a written statement of their position, and submit the statement for consideration by the total group of Workshop participants. All five concerns were addressed. The statements were then rated on a Likert-type scale questionnaire and individual comments were requested; for example, a rating of "Acceptable with minor revision" required a comment on the revision needed for that statement to be "Acceptable." Participants were then provided with the results of the ratings for each statement and a compilation of the comments. Returning to task, two groups were selected at random and assigned to refine further the content of each of the statements made on the five concerns. In this way, two position statements were prepared for each area and were again rated by the entire Workshop. The results were tabulated and a single generally agreed upon statement resulted for each area of concern.

A FUNCTIONAL DEFINITION OF CBAE

It has been noted that some confusion seems to exist when it comes to competency-based education and adult programs; that is, APL *vis-a-vis* CBAE and other approaches to functional literacy. Not surprisingly, a problem which surfaced early in the Delphi survey of selected issues in CBAE was the lack of a definition for the topic. The Delphi was purposely directed toward developing a definition, not having participants react to a proposed definition. Although definitions and comments on CBAE exist in the literature, they often find their meaning in educational areas other than ABE. Therefore, if a functional or classical definition of CBAE were developed and met with general agreement, associated components and/or elements relevant to the ABE experience might be described.

Based upon the prior experiences and knowledge of the participants at the DAE/USOE Workshop, the modified Delphi survey, and the cooperation in the small group sessions at New Orleans, CBAE was defined as follows:

> Competency-based adult education is a performance-based process leading to demonstrated mastery of basic and life skills necessary for the individual to function proficiently in society.

In this definition, the essence of CBAE is expressed in terms of explicit descriptors: performance-based process; demonstrated mastery; basic and life skills, and function proficiently. These terms were contained in many of the definitions resulting from the small group sessions at the New Orleans Workshop. The few that did not used similar terminology. In addition, a great many of the comments that were made while coming up with the above definition expressed CBAE in such components parts. With This thought in mind, a brief discussion of these descriptors seems in order.

Performance-based means that actual behavior is required on the part of the learner or client: directed action is undertaken; a task is to be completed; a mission, so to speak, accomplished, and energy expended. There is little room for passivity. To a large extent, learner responsibility is required in the CBAE process. The learner and the educator/instructor/facilitator must collaborate in the identification of learning goals and the methods and techniques or strategies required to produce or achieve the desired behavior or outcome. The performance required for any agreed upon outcomes may exhibit a variety of expression based upon many factors and/or influences. This performance process flexibility must be interpreted primarily in terms of particular CBAE areas; for example, employability, personal and family management, civic and social responsibility, or as asthetic and humanistic needs and desires.

Demonstrated mastery is the assessment function for performance. This function is far from simple and very often results in some confusion and controversy. For example, various educational groups and commentators are making decisions and voicing opinions for or against the practice of minimal competency testing: often a pencil and paper assessment of basic skill acquisition applied to everyday situations such as reading a television program schedule or computing a unit cost for an item in the supermarket. Minimal competency testing is not competency-based education. To confuse the concepts is to do both a grave injustice. The demonstrations of mastery in a CBAE activity is the keystone between the performance process and the identified or predetermined basic or life skill objective for that activity. The expanding recognition of the credit value of life experiences of adults may serve to illustrate the point. The life experience becomes legitimized in terms of a "credit bearing," predetermined or specified skill by the adult performing or documenting performance from past actions or activity. The demonstrated mastery, then, serves an adjudication function. There is, of course, more to it than this. Because many CBAE crucial factors are directly associated with the assessment of demonstrated mastery, this topic deserved far more attention than can be given here. A forthcoming book analyzing the Delphi data and providing a further exploration of the issue is in the works.

Basic and life skills must serve a partnership role in CBAE plans and activities: the former being considered more cognitive in nature such as the fields of reading and mathematics; the latter directed more toward the humanistic side in terms of the application of basic skills to defined and explicitly stated life roles. There is ample evidence of this partnership taking place. In almost every instance, the growing number of competency-based adult high school or secondary completion programs are organized to provide basic and life skills as an alternative to either existing programs or to the GED testing procedure as a means of obtaining a diploma. The U.S. Senate's amendment to the Adult Education Act, in the markup of S.1753, called for the Statement of Purpose for the ABE program to be expanded to include persons requiring basic skills and competence while continuing to serve those with less than a secondary school equivalency. Research such as the national APL study, Winthrop Adkins' Life Skills projects, and the on-going, state sponsored CBAE activity including over 150 projects in 43 states stress the life skills-functional literacy duality.

Outwardly this stress on providing basic as well as life skills continues to center around issues of certification and/or credentialing of one kind of another. Then too, there is the question of consistency in predetermined basic and life objectives: national, as in the case of ABE; regional; statewide, or to a lesser extent local. Certainly the important aspect of having the learner share in the identification and/or determination of learning goals must not be overlooked. The necessity of any basic or life skill objective, in the long run, has at least three sides: individual, programmatic, and societal.

The purpose toward which CBAE effort is directed is that the individual *function proficiently* in society. The term "proficiently" is used here to connote advancement in progress. Society, purposely not qualified by either the definite or indefinite article, simply means association with others. If we could put an end to change, stop all progress, and remain with the same persons in the same place for our lifetime, things might be less complicated but there would still be the need to function in a number of roles such as citizen, family member, worker, parent, and user of leisure time. There would still be levels of mastery and degrees of successful performance for even the most elementary of tasks. Couple this with the process of aging/maturing and it becomes apparent that a performance-based process leading to demonstrated mastery of basic and life skills may be necessary.

CRUCIAL FACTORS IN CBAE

The definition of competency-based adult education described above does not contain crucial elements or factors for two reasons: There are too many of them and to include only selected elements in a definition tends to make it cumbersome and limited in scope without further clarification. Crucial factors associated with CBAE, or those we have an awareness of, are relative. In order to achieve and maintain program flexibility and accountability in terms of learner needs and expected outcomes, the priority given to any or all CBAE factors becomes, in itself, an issue. Consider, for a moment, the Adult Basic Education program. The Adult Education Act and accompanying Rules and Regulations set limitations on levels of service for certain populations, mandate that provisions be made for cooperation and coordination, determine that special emphasis or assistance be given to specified programs, limit administrative costs at the state level, and establish required reporting systems. This listing is representative rather than complete. In addition to the federal mandates, a request is made that state education agencies take steps to assure conformity of goals and objectives of the ABE program with those of the state and assure consistency in administrative practices. As if this weren't enough, the local education agencies are busy personing the redoubts in defense of their autonomy. Therefore, a consideration of CBAE factors in the face of all this would seem to stand in need of a classical or functional definition which, while consistent, could be amplified or clarified as the situation or moment dictated. The definition arrived at in the New Orleans Workshop was developed to address this classical or functional requirement.

The following factors, considered crucial for CBAE, were identified by analyzing all of the definitions of CBAE created in the New Orleans Workshop, and reviewing the suggested revisions made by the participants. Ten definitions were written, reduced to two, and edited into the single definition reported above. There were over 160 comments written on the CBAE interpretations. The following list is by no means exhaustive; however, it does present under 11 major headings many of the more significant crucial factors to be considered in CBAE.

- *Identification or determination of needs*. Major issues in assessing needs are clustered around the questions of "by whom?" and "at what" level: national, state, local, individual? Associated areas include testing, surveys, validity and reliability, and predetermined objectives *vis-a-vis* learner needs.
- *Delivery system*. Some of the questions raised about the delivering of CBAE services focus on the administrative, instructional, and counseling elements; that is, planning requirements, coordination at various levels, role of the educator in the CBAE process,

60

facilities, resources, and the provision of CBAE as a program alternative.

- *Methodology*. The relationship of CBAE to existing instructional-programmatic frameworks is one of the more significant factors. In addition to the basic "how to" questions are concerns for approaches with different adult populations or client groups, scope and sequence of learning activities, and issues of adult learning theory.

- *Curriculum*. The nature and content of expected CBAE outcomes, learning materials, and developmental policy are expressed concerns in the curriculum area. The imposition of a federal (on the state) or state (on the local) curriculum is opposed in very strong terms.

- *Measurement*. Two of the more continually stressed concerns relative to the assessment of CBAE outcomes are the establishing of criteria and instrumentation for valid measurement. The area of demonstrated mastery of objectives is at issue.

- *Funding*. Emphasis in funding is on the necessity of being assured sufficient resources to meet needs. Another strong issue is coordination of CBAE among funding sources and/or agencies with related or compatible program objectives or clientele; namely, CETA and Title XX programs.

- *Staff development*. Training and the expectation of retraining make staff development issues survival matters as the changing role and function of the educator in CBAE emerge. No less volatile are concerns raised in terms of the nature and extent of technical assistance, learning resources, teacher competencies, and certification.

- *Reporting systems*. Data requirements and record-keeping are important concerns for CBAE programs and activities. Issues in this area include transcripts, confidentiality, and compatability with existing systems. The possible addition of clerical personnel was mentioned.

- *Accountability*. There are strong feelings that accountability in CBAE activities should be more learner-centered than in existing programs. Mandates and predetermination of CBAE objectives are accountability issues.

- *Credentials*. The acceptance of CBAE attesting documents by the learners, post-secondary institutions, and employers is a crucial concern in program development. Continuing Education Units (CEU's), external diplomas, and continuing professional development certification are in question.

- *Political considerations*. Legislation and public relations are major concerns for CBAE programming efforts. The political elements most

81

> cited stressed one or more of the following issues: federal or state mandates, local education agency autonomy, interagency cooperation and coordination, use of advisory councils, institutional support, and public image.

Obviously these factors are not mutually exclusive. For example, the issue raised as delivery system subsumes methodology, curriculum, measurement, record-keeping, and accountability. The assessment of needs, funding, staff development, and credentialing are also political considerations. The descriptors discussed in terms of the functional definition of CBAE presented earlier may also be mixed and matched, so to speak, with these crucial factors. In this manner, the descriptors "educational process" may involve all the factors to some extent.

EPILOGUE

Competency-based adult education may mean many things to many people. The literature in the field, results of the modified Delphi survey of CBAE and ABE issues, and some reaction to the APL study suggest that this, in fact, is the case. As with such programs as Career Education and Community Education, meaning often becomes more apparent as concepts become reality. The definition of CBAE and discussion of the crucial factors presented here are steps toward the formation of this reality for Adult Basic Education in descriptive rather than in normative terms. The data are field-based, and deal with the most immediate concerns of ABE practitioners.

State laws and resolutions for competency-related changes in the public schools may have the potential for impacting adult education programs. Nationally, the ABE program may be reconsidered in terms of adult competencies and functional literacy issues. How the CBAE movement grows and flourishes becomes, in the final analysis, a function of the willingness of educators to accept the process during this period of educational renaissance.

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PROCESS APPROACHES TO CBAE STAFF AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT: THE CALIFORNIA EXPERIENCE

By

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Competency-based adult education demands competency-based staff development. All too often inservice education has had no clearly defined goals. Teachers and administrators have been uncertain of the expected outcomes of inservice programs. The California Adult Competency Education (CACE) Project has demonstrated over the past five years the validity of a process model for staff development for ABE teachers that incorporates clear objectives in the development of a competency-based curriculum. If competency-based programs for adults are to succeed, they must have the support of sound competency-based staff development programs.

Toward these ends, the California State Department of Education has supported the exploration and development of competency-based adult education (CBAE) in California. Without such support and coordination, this State could not have produced the current cohesive, developmental program from beginning ABE levels through the high school diploma program for adults.

The CACE Project, funded under 309 and 310 grants, has designed a staff development sequence appropriate for all adult education, but especially appropriate for competency-based programs. That sequence follows:

Awareness Activities

In working with educators, it is rarely safe to assume a level of sophistication. In spite of the number of years that the APL Project has been discussed and demonstrated, surveys of adult educators continue to reveal significant numbers who are either totally unfamiliar or have only minimal acquaintance with this competency-based concept.

Even today those who are aware of competency-based education often confuse the concept with competency-based testing. Two levels of awareness activities (general and specific) were therefore an integral part of the California staff development approach.

To promote general awareness, a "Road Show" was designed and developed by six former CACE participants. This Road Show, called "CBE-LIVE," travelled throughout the State presenting major concepts of CBAE in an entertainment format. At the level of specific training, teachers in workshops were helped immediately to construct competency-based curriculum materials.

In both instances, immediate involvement in enjoyable and non-threatening activities was an essential ingredient. The Road Show, for example, after presenting a musical introduction to CBAE, involved the audience in a card-sort game that explored the principles of competency-based education. Next, a humorous dramatization of a competency-based and a traditional classroom was presented. The audience was then involved again in self-selected groups for more in-depth exploration of a specific competency-based curriculum module. The one-hour show concluded with a reprise of the CBE-LIVE song.

Audience evaluations were outstanding. From the over 400 adult educators who attended the show, the most frequent comment was that they wanted more time. Some came back for two or three performances. Interestingly, the Road Show format fostered awareness at one level, while acting as a dissemination vehicle of CBAE at another.

On the other hand, the specific, long-term, competency-based staff development training sessions consisted of voluntary teacher/administrator teams. Here also it was found more successful to involve the participants immediately in the writing of a short, competency-based curriculum module than to explain and demonstrate the process. Having experienced the successes and problems of constructing a curriculum module, the participants, at a later time, were much better able to select and evaluate curriculum appropriate to their classes. That is, they had a much greater awareness of such essential ingredients as the necessary parallelism of pre-and post-tests, the inclusion of objective-related activities, and the identification of performance standards.

An important awareness activity at the outset of CBAE module construction was a needs assessment of the population for which the module was being prepared. One group, for instance, was designing a check-writing module for low-level, rural migrant, ESL students only to discover that none of the students had checking accounts nor did they want or trust them. Obviously, other topics would be more successful as starting points. Many such concerns of student populations were raised to levels of awareness during the needs assessment procedures.

Planning Staff Development Programs

Effective staff development requires planning at the local level. For many years teachers have been told that they must adapt their teaching to the particular needs of their students. Yet staff development programs have usually been designed as if all teachers have the same needs. Adult teachers especially vary greatly in their backgrounds of education and experience. Only by assessing the individual needs of a given group of teachers in relation to a specific program can their needs be identified.

Furthermore, for change to occur, individual teachers must be committed to grow professionally in directions they choose. Frequently the implication behind inservice education programs has been that teachers and others are deficient in some way and the programs will remedy this deficiency. Frequently, too, inservice programs have been designed for staff without their involvement in planning. Symbolic of this approach may be the use of the word "inservice" as a verb so that teachers can be said to be "inserviced" with all the negative connotations that term implies. It is not surprising that such programs often encounter apathy or active resistance.

Adult educators, in particular, because they work for the most part with students who come voluntarily, have every right to feel that they are successful in what they are doing, otherwise the students would not return. On the one hand, staff development programs in adult education must be viewed as building on successful practices rather than making a complete change. On the other hand, the change proposed must be encompassing enough so that staff development efforts are viewed as worthwhile investments of time and energy. Staff development to implement CBAE would seem to meet these criteria.

The most wide-scale study ever made of "Federal Programs Supporting Change," the so-called Rand Study, found that many local educational agencies undertook projects because federal funding was available even though local interest was limited. Few such programs continued after federal support was withdrawn. The key to successful programs, however, was not the money involved but the quality and behavior of the local staff. Programs were most likely to succeed if teachers clearly understood the goals, received administrative support, and developed strategies for carrying out the programs at the local level.

In addition, pacing of both the staff training program and its implementation is crucial. Rather than preparing teachers for the entire CBAE program in an intensive training program to be implemented later, a program that trains then implements a step-at-a-time is likely to be more successful and satisfying. Previous awareness activities, however, should have provided an adequate concept of the total program.

Specifically, once needs assessment procedures are learned, such assessments can be carried out before the participants return to discuss the results and to plan the next step. Our experience has shown that training sessions and implementation steps at intervals of every other month seem to be well-paced.

67

Staff development sessions, for example, have been held in September, November, February, and April with implementation activities occurring in the intervening months.

Intensive "one-shot" schedules are likely to effect little change. We once tried an intensive one-week summer program of adult staff development using all the same components as the program spaced over a school year. The results were most disappointing. Teachers were obviously over-saturated, over-tired, and overwhelmed! School program results were minimal and little effective follow-up was possible. Longer, intensive sessions, however, can be effective if participants are already sophisticated in the techniques being explored so they can be involved as designers rather than trainees. Additionally, adequate follow-up and/or modification sessions should be provided during the following year.

If staff are to be motivated to participate in staff development activities, they must share not only their needs and interests but also their skills in program planning. Only genuine staff involvement can generate maximum response. Administrators alone cannot hope to achieve the most creative planning. If staff development is to provide the training required for competency-based adult education, it would seem important that there be a separate planning committee for this purpose, and that this committee include teachers, counselors, administrators, aides, volunteers, and any others involved with such programs.

Implementing Staff Development Programs

Several ingredients are essential to the successful implementation of a staff development program. Most important is support. More important than financial support is a well-informed and sympathetic community and administrative structure. Staff development training sessions that had active and cooperative administrator/counselor/teacher teams were much more successful than teams of teachers only.

Teachers perform best when they are able to participate in staff development activities on "prime time" as part of their professional assignment. In California, we have been fortunate that the State Department of Education has seen fit to place funds with professional organizations such as CCAE (California Council on Adult Education) and ACSA (Association of California School Administrators) who act as brokers of consultants, as does the CACE Project, and who are enabled to offer teachers small remuneration and travel costs if needed to participate in staff development programs. Such support is particularly needed by part-time adult teachers.

Likewise, teacher workshops should be held in comfortable surroundings, preferably away from school sites that encourage interruptions or entice the teachers back to their routine tasks. Often community centers, agencies, or local hotels will provide such facilities without cost or, especially in the case of hotels, if a luncheon is purchased. Adult teachers can then feel more like other professional groups in the community.

Evaluation if staff development sessions and implementation programs is necessary on a continuing basis -- not as something that happens at the end of the program when it is often too late to make modifications. Another major advantage of the alternating training/implementation process is that after each step the participants return and the first order of discussion is: How did it go? Thus each site learns from the problems and successes of the others and more objective resources can be brought to bear on the problems that any one group is having. In addition, new evaluative devices can be tried out and themselves be evaluated as part of the process.

A side benefit that has accrued from such statewide staff development sessions is a sense of "family" that comes from having caring others to help resolve staff problems. Individuals and groups continue to be in contact long after the sessions are over and programs are in place. Curriculum continues to be exchanged and former participants arrange to meet at conferences or to share in new staff development programs, if they are in neighboring areas.

Disseminating Staff Development Programs

When programs of staff development are successful with some teachers, it is important that other adult educators also have an opportunity to benefit from such programs. Often teachers themselves can be the best agents for change. But teachers skilled in working with their adult students still need special training for working with other teachers if they are to become successful staff developers.

The CACE Process has stressed that above all they must learn to demonstrate, through their own practice in staff development, the steps in CBAE that they in turn expect other teachers to use. They must learn to assess staff needs; to select appropriate content, teaching strategies, and resources; to organize individual, small-group, and large-group modes of instruction; and to use effective evaluation techniques. In short, they are asked to model the behaviors they are teaching rather than merely to talk about them.

Another significant form of dissemination is inter-staff visitation, observation, and sharing in a systematic way. Recent studies of school change emphasize the power of teachers observing other teachers for professional growth; but the sharing must be carefully planned and followed up if its potential is to be fully realized. One goal of the CACE Process has been to have resources available to make intervisitation possible.

For dissemination to occur on a larger scale, publications must be made available, and presentations made at various local, state, regional, and national meetings. CACE has been fortunate in having such opportunities for dissemination but especially in being asked to sponsor two large conferences on competency-based adult education: the first in June of 1977 in San Francisco and the second in June of 1979 in San Diego. In both instances a wide cross section of persons engaged in competency-based education in many avenues of adult education throughout the United States shared their insights and concerns for new directions and the future of CBAE.

PRINCIPLES OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT

As a result of five years of competency-based curriculum and staff development activities throughout California, several principles have emerged as basic to successful staff development for adult education programs:

1. Awareness activities are critical in introducing CBAE to both new and experienced personnel.
2. Staff development should begin with the most competent teachers if it is hoped that the teachers themselves will become staff developers.
3. Planning should include all segments of those involved in the program: administrators, teachers, counselors, paraprofessionals, and volunteers.
4. Staff development should build on teacher strengths and start by assessing the needs of teachers as they perceive them, stressing growth rather than deficiency.
5. Staff development takes spaced time and should be recurring with intervals of implementation between training sessions.
6. Financial support is needed so that teachers can participate in staff development on "prime time," but more important is involvement of administrators and support of board and community members.
7. Individual consultation should be available on teacher request.
8. Teacher workshops should be held in comfortable, non-disruptive surroundings.
9. Evaluation should provide continuous feedback on effectiveness of staff development programs.
10. Teachers trained as staff developers can be highly effective in working with other staff members to effect change.

The California Competency-Based High School Diploma Program for Adults (CALCOMP)

California is introducing competency-based high-school diploma programs for adults through a process model called CALCOMP that originates in local districts.

Seven districts, representing adult student populations ranging from inner-city to rural, with diverse ethnic and language backgrounds, have been field-testing this process approach. With federal and State support through P.L. 91-230, Section 309 funds they have worked in a CALCOMP Committee and Consortium to develop the steps in the process model necessary to introduce, implement, evaluate, and provide staff development for these programs.

Step 1 establishes a local planning group representative of those directly involved with theprogram. Their first tasks are to set up an advisory committee with broad community representation, to assess local needs for a competency-based high-school diplomas program for adults, and to initiate activities to develop awareness of CBAE.

Step 2 designs a Statement of Philosophy for the competency-based programs. All too often, statements of philosophy are nothing more than lost pages of forgotten ideals that gather dust on office shelves. In designing a program that is competency-based, the statement of philosophy represents local commitment to a set of assumptions about adult competency-based learning. All the stages in the CALCOMP Process -- program goals and objectives, curriculum and staff development, learner assessment, and evaluation -- must build on these assumptions so that the statement of philosophy can in fact be realized in the program. The CALCOMP Statement of Philosophy,* prepared for the high-school diploma program for adults, may serve as a model of a philosophy which can be translated into actual components of a competency-based program.

Step 3 identifies and rank orders competencies so that a core of competencies can be selected as the basis for designing the curriculum. Based on the concept that local communities best know local needs, community members join with adult school staff and students in recommending to public boards of education or community college boards of trustees what competencies should be required for high-school graduation. In many instances as part of this process, adult educators are working with their secondary-school colleagues on district-wide committees to determine minimum requirements in basic skills to meet state legal mandates.

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* The CALCOMP Statement of Philosophy appears at the end of this article.

Step 4 implements the competency-based curriculum by organizing the content, teaching-learning strategies, and modes of delivery to facilitate competency-based instruction. The CALCOMP sites have developed curricula that first satisfies their adult students' immediate survival needs for functional competencies and then proceeds to other identified needs. Alternative ways of reaching the same goals are provided from more traditional teacher-class situations to individualized learning laboratories with flexible open entry-open exit scheduling. Especially needed is articulation between the ABE and high-school programs.

Step 5 assesses individual learners to determine their status in relation to well-defined competency performance standards. The content and strategies of assessment should be clearly described, be known to the students, allow for choice of time and technique, and be adaptable.

Step 6 selects or constructs appropriate resources. In addition to commercially prepared materials and the products of other 309 projects, CALCOMP sites have been fortunate in having special resources through the Competency-Based Live-Ability Skills (CLASS) Project in Clovis for classroom and individualized competency based modules for grades 0 to 8 (soon to be published by Fearon-Pitman Publishers, Inc.) and through the Los Angeles Competency-Based Adult Diploma Project for Competency Achievement Packets (CAPS) for grades 9 to 12 (soon to be completed). Another major resource has been the Information, Collection, Dissemination, and Evaluation Service (ICDES) in San Diego which is now providing six repositories of selected materials throughout the State.

Step 7 evaluates the competency-based programs and provides a basis for continued revision and refinement of the CALCOMP process and of the local programs. The CALCOMP Committee and Consortium anticipates designing a program evaluation plan during 1979-80 to gather process and outcome data that will provide a basis for effective evaluation.

Step 8 provides staff development differentiated according to the expressed needs for improved competencies of beginning and experienced teachers, counselors, administrators, paraprofessionals, and volunteers. Planning committees at local CALCOMP sites design varied staff development programs using local and State resources. The CACE Project has resources to assist with planning and implementation of these programs, including brokered consultants and inter-site visitation, as well as to sponsor a week-long August Institute for selected CALCOMP administrators, teachers, and counselor-learning assessors.

The CALCOMP Committee and Consortium have compiled a monograph, "Competency-Based Adult Education: A Process Model," which has been field-tested at the local sites during 1978-79 and published by the State Department of Education in the fall of 1979. CALCOMP administrators, teachers, and counselor-learning assessors have also joined in initial dissemination activities through presentations at the Conference on the Future of Adult Competency Education in San Diego in June, 1979. During 1979-80 it is hoped that a second monograph in the form of a management manual and two multi-media presentations can be developed to aid in further staff development and dissemination activities.

STATEMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
A COMPETENCY-BASED ADULT HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA PROGRAM

The goal of competency-based adult education is to provide an educational framework that is relevant to the practical needs of adults, and includes the proficiencies necessary for competence in today's world. In order to construct and implement a competency-based adult diploma program, the CalComp Committee recommends the adoption of the following philosophical precepts:

> The basis for awarding diplomas and/or certificates will be demonstrated competence.
>
> Within the credit-earning structure of traditional curricula, demonstrated competence will be the basis for receiving credit in all courses.
>
> Minimum competencies shall be determined. All learners shall be encouraged to exceed the minimum level of competence consistent with individual need, interest, and capability.

To ensure the success of every learner, experiential prerequisites will be established, assessed, and certified as entry requirements into specific courses and programs.

Alternative means, in terms of time, place, programs, and formats shall be provided to give adult learners the opportunity to achieve their educational goals.

Learners who cannot or do not demonstrate all of the competencies required for the adult diploma will receive certification of those competencies they have demonstrated.

Adult learners differ from elementary and secondary pupils, and therefore require unique instructional content, strategies, materials, and assessment.

All educational constituents (students, teachers, counselors, administrators, community representatives, local, state, and federal agencies) shall actively participate in determining the goals of curricula.

Curriculum will be structured in such a way as to require the continuous and extensive interaction of basic skills in every content area where this can possibly be accomplished.

Competency can be demonstrated, assessed, and certified in a number of ways. For example: by examination, by documented work experience, and by the successful completion of classes.

The assessment and certification of competencies shall be ongoing and continuous throughout courses and programs.

The competency-based adult diploma is a renewed commitment to the educational needs of learners in California, and is aimed toward functional competence for all adults. Functional competence shall be the basic requirement for granting the adult diploma. It is believed that the competency-based diploma program for adults is uniquely designed for adult learner interests, abilities, and sensibilities. This achievement is the result of the formulation and promotion of an educational framework with a sound philosophical basis that reflects the uniqueness of each community's adult education program in California.

Designing Competency Based Learning Centers

By

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Adult Learning Centers are facilities which meet the educational needs of students with widely different abilities and backgrounds. Through the use of a variety of media, materials, and teaching methods students can receive instruction based on their personal objectives, current skill levels, and their own particular learning styles.

Adult learning centers are a relatively new addition to adult basic education. The earliest centers began in the mid-sixties to early seventies, some under sponsorship of 309 monies, others from local support. One of the earliest centers was implemented by the New Jersey Department of Education in 1964. The Hacienda La Puente Unified School District in California has also operated a learning center since 1966, however, entirely from local monies.

Since their inception adult learning centers have contained many elements common to most definitions of competency-based education. In discussing the characteristics of competency-based education William Spady writes:

> The emphasis placed on outcome evaluation by CBE programs is an attempt to create a goal-dominated basis for the control of study behavior. Moreover, students appear to achieve competency through different sorts of learning experiences. To the reformer, this calls for the creation of several different opportunities for pursuing each of the target outcome goals, including out-of-school activities.

Learning centers are an ideal vehicle for implementing competency based education as described by Spady. The very structure of a learning center allows for the flexibility and creativity that is needed if competency based education is to become a meaningful part of adult education.

At most learning centers, students can register at any time and establish class schedules which will not interfere with demands of work or home. Since learning center instruction is individualized and self-paced, common problems which often interfere with adults completing school are not factors. The student can never get behind, as his rate of achievement is determined by his own learning ability and the number of hours he is able to attend.

Competency-based learning centers can represent exciting and innovative approaches to adult education. They have the potential of allowing students, educators, and the community to become partners in the adult education process. Because the ideal learning center is, in essence, a living definition of competency-based education, such a center has the capability of meeting the diverse needs of adult school students, while at the same time raising the coping skills or competencies of its participants on an individualized basis. In the initial design of a competency-based learning center, there are specific elements which need to be addressed in the planning stages.

1. Purpose: What will be the purpose of the center? Will it be primarily aimed at the adult basic education student below an eighth grade level at the adult high school diploma student, or a combination? What is the average reading level of the target audience? Is the target population primarily native English speaking or is Spanish the first language? What relationship will the center have to local vocational training programs? This information is important for purposes of course design and materials selection.

2. Community Involvement: It is essential that designers of competency-based learning centers involve community representatives in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the program. The learning center will be much more likely to survive over a long period if the community feels an emotional

investment in the program. In addition, instructional material can avoid becoming obsolete if frequent community and industry input is sought in order to keep curriculum reflecting real life demands.

It is important that communication and participation be two-way. A community advisory council for the learning center is an important source of information and communication. However, learning center staff should also involve themselves as members of other agency advisory councils. It is important that staff go into the community and find out first-hand the needs and desires of the population.

3. Physical Operations: Learning centers need to be located within the geographic area of the population to be served, and should be walking distance from public transportation. It is often advantageous to house the center in a building that is already identifiable to the residents of the community -- this could be a church building, an elementary school, a community center or other public buildings.

For establishing the hours of operation it must be remembered that adults have a variety of other commitments including family and work. If it is not feasible to operate the center all day and evening, then it should be open at least during the hours of greatest demand. Peak hours at most centers are in the morning and in the evening. Afternoons tend to be low in attendance as most adults have children coming home from school and spouses returning from work at that time.

Competency-based learning centers should also stress the open-entry-open exit approach to enrollment and attendance. This system allows students to enroll in courses at any time during the year, leave whenever their needs are met, and receive credit for demonstration of specific competencies rather than for time spent in the classroom. When instruction is individualized as it is in a learning center, the open entry-open exit system works well. Additionally, it has a greater opportunity to meet students' needs than does the closed semester approach.

4. Course Selection and Development: Consideration needs to be given to the number of courses which will be offered. Learning centers vary from a few courses offered to over sixty. It's preferable to start with a few basic courses, experiment with them, and expand gradually. CBE procedures should be integrated into each course including specific objectives designed to teach selected competencies, criterion referenced testing, procedures and requirements which are clear to the student prior to beginning the course, and an opportunity to progress through the course at the student's own pace.

In an effort to meet individual reading level needs, courses can be written at three or more levels using increasingly more difficult reading materials which cover the content area. For example, three courses on the U.S. Government could be written at fifth, eighth, and tenth grade reading levels, with the content and competencies addressed being the same. (For samples of such course outlines please contact the author).

5. Development of Learning Packets of Modules: Learning modules are self-contained instructional units which can be part of an ongoing course or can be taught independent of a course for a student who needs the specific information or skill taught in that particular module.

The typical learning packet consists of the following components:

a. Concept focus (what is the skill being taught), etc.
b. Behaviorally-stated objectives
c. Pre-test
d. Learning activities
e. Post-test
f. Student evaluation
g. Optional quest activites (in-depth activities)[1]

6. Attention to Different Learning Modes: There is a prevailing misconception that learning centers consist almost entirely of programmed instructional materials. While these kinds of materials play a major role in the operation of learning centers, they should not be used to the exclusion of other approaches. A competency-based

learning center recognizes that people learn in a variety of ways, that as long as the competency is achieved, the road to get there can be one of many.

Some people work well independently, while others need more instructor contact on a group or a tutoring basis. Others prefer larger group work in addition to the independent learning of programmed instruction. The learning centers of the Hacienda La Puente School District provide a variety of approaches including one-to-one volunteer tutoring, large and small group instruction on specific competencies, and teacher assisted independent study. Learning centers can also make use of optional lectures on a pre-determined subject, manipulative labs, filmstrips, films, cassette tapes, and other audio-visual materials.

Regardless of the specific teaching strategy used for an individual student, learning should be acquired in small steps, involving an active response from the student. There should also be frequent feedback built into the teaching strategies so that the students know how they are progressing at all times. Regardless of the learning mode there should also be provision for the student's self-pacing. Learning packets, as described in the previous section, can help provide the individualization that is a vital component to a competency based learning center.

7. Coordination with Counseling Staff: Communication between counselors and the learning center staff is vital, since accurate student placement in appropriate course work is a necessity. In some organizations, counselors do all the diagnostic testing of a student and send the person to the learning center with predetermined objectives. In other organizations the learning center does its own diagnostic testing, and counselors refer students with general recommendations which are made more specific by learning center staff. There is no one right way to set up such a system, so long as this communication link is included in the procedure at some point.

Some learning centers are experimenting with adding a third staff role called an assessor, who works in the center alongside the instructors but whose primary function is to assess students. This is a new approach which is presently being field-tested in several Los Angeles City adult schools. Its main drawback is cost, since most centers cannot afford the cost of an extra staff member. Thus, most assessment will occur either by counselors or instructors. For this reason coordination between counselors and learning center instructors is essential.

8. Pre and Post Testing: Pre and post testing is an important element of a competency based learning center. It is essential to know the ability level of students when entering the program, and to have accurate information on the ongoing progress of the student. However, many adult students are test-shy, having failed tests in the past. Thus one should not throw a lot of testing at the student the first day he enrolls. Testing can occur on a relaxed basis over a number of days.

It is important to remember that competency-based education stresses demonstration. Testing should not be limited to paper/pencil procedures. Group discussions, individual reports and projects, actual demonstrations of a skill where appropriate, can all substitute paper and pencil tasks.

9. Staff Selection and Staff Development: Expensive equipment, beautiful facilities, and the latest instructional materials will not result in a successful learning center if the proper staff are not selected.

Although academic background is one factor in staff selection, there are other equal or more important factors. Instructor attitude is vitally important to the success of any instructional method. The New Jersey learning center project found that teacher attitudes relating to student achievement were tolerance, empathy, compassion, sensitivity, integrity, sincerity, kindness, patience, and pleasantness.

In addition to the aforementioned personality factors, areas of academic proficiency and competency must be filled if an adult basic education learning center is to function properly. In the area of academic proficiency, staff membe should complement one another's areas of expertise, the total staff having the full array of skills required

The New Jersey Department of Education project lists the following areas as representing the full variety of staff skills needed

reading instruction
adult basic and continuing education
high school equivalency examination preparation
educational testing
programmed instructional materials and techniques of use
guidance
social work
vocational testing and job placement
community affairs
bilingual abilities
audio-visual equipment experience
administration

Obviously, since no one staff member will have all these abilities, it is important to select staff so that the skills are spread through the organization.

Pre-service training and ongoing staff development are essential elements to a successful learning center Pre-service activities could include visiting other learning centers, conferring with directors of welfare and community service agencies, and visiting local college adult and continuing education resource centers. The extent of pre-service training necessary will be based on the experience and expertise of the selected staff. Pre-service training can often be arranged through adult education resource centers, staff members of currently operating learning centers, special consultants from the state departments of education, or training representatives from publishing companies Teacher-training seminars conducted at various colleges and universities across the nation are held for both experienced and inexperienced teachers An on-site visitation to a successful existing center with a follow-up workshop makes ideal pre-service packages.

Ongoing staff development activities should be structured so that they constantly improve the abilities of the learning center staff. Staff should be surveyed on a regular basis to assess the areas where staff development activities could have the most benefit. The same resources can be used for ongoing staff development as was used for pre-service training, the difference being a narrower focus.

10. Financing: Many adult programs are reluctant to begin operating learning centers as they believe the cost is prohibitive. However, the opposite is actually true, since there are many centers which have been in operation for over a decade. Much information can be gained from them, thus reducing developmental costs for new centers.

It is not necessary to buy a lot of sophisticated equipment or beautiful learning carrels; a spacious room with adequate instructional materials and a caring staff are the essential ingredients.

Cost can also be reduced by making use of volunteers and paraprofessionals to supplement certificated staff. In addition to cutting costs, using volunteers brings active community representatives into the learning center, and as stated before, community visibility and support is important to the long term survival of a center.

In summary, competency-based learning centers require quite a bit of preliminary organization. However, once the system is in operation, not only do centers become more cost effective than traditional classroom programs, but the instructor is freed from the ongoing requirements of preparing lesson plans, lectures, and exams. Instead, the teacher becomes a participant in the student's learning process on a much more personal basis

NOTES

[1] From an unpublished document by Mary Kernodle, Programmed Instruction Lab, La Puente Valley Adult Schools, La Puente, CA

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Don't Bother Us...We Can Cope: CBE for ESL

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> Competency-Based Adult Education: an educational process leading to demonstrated mastery of basic and life skills necessary for the individual to function in society.

ESL practitioners have always been generally committed to the goal of helping adult learners function in a strange society and more specifically learn the language of their new environment. Therefore, for instructors, administrators and counselors of adult ESL programs CBE is neither a revoluntionary process nor a concept [illegible]th which we can't cope. To say that we in ESL have "taught" adult learners to survive is, however, presumptious. Adult ESL learners have "survived" many different contexts. That they have immigrated to a new society is proof that they have survived a great deal. What we are perhaps better equipped to do is what we have always proposed we do best: help with the language learning process and improve functional competency. If we view the language in its totality and accept the components to include the structure (written and oral systems), the phonology, vocabulary, and the non-verbal system, we can then look at the total picture of what adult learners are confronted with in order to function competently in our society, and what our role is in facilitating their learning to cope more effectively. Coping skills in ESL is, then, a bringing together of the language (structurally speaking) and the culture inherent in the language in a way that is consistent with the adult learner's needs and a representation of the real language used in his/her real world. Competency-based adult education, as a process leading to the mastery of basic and life skills, is then in harmony with our goals in ESL programs. We too are looking to assist students in becoming autonomous individuals capable of functioning in our society. For even many native Americans this is difficult; in the case of ESL learners it is further complicated by the fact that the society is a "foreign" one in which not only cultural but linguistic problems need to be attended to.

If we examine the process we use to determine an ESL curriculum perhaps we can better understand the relationship of coping skills to the ESL learner. Most of the time in preparing a lesson, we deal with some basic issues: 1) What am I going to teach? (content of a lesson) 2) How am I going to teach this? (methodology) 3) Why am I going to teach this? Sometimes we become so focused on the "what's" and the "how's" that we never really consider the "why" or what could logically follow, "Should I be doing this at all or should I be doing something different?" By considering the "why's" and "should's" before the "what's" and "how's" a competency-based ESL process can be implemented. The shift, then, is from a curriculum-limiting approach in which the learner's needs are not considered to a learner-generated process in which the goal is to enable the adult learner to realize his/her personal objectives. Let us examine the three questions in terms of their implications for establishing an ESL/CBE program.[1]

1) Why am I going to teach this? (and should I be doing something different?)

If we are committed to meeting the needs of our adult learners then to answer this question we must have some basis for determining what the needs are. Utilizing reliable needs assessment instruments both formal and informal are ways to determine what adults perceive to be their needs. A good example of a formal needs assessment has been developed and field tested by Jean Bodman and Susan Lanzano at the Adult Education Resource Center, Jersey City State College, New Jersey.[2] This carefully constructed student interest survey was administered in eighteen languages. It is an excellent attempt at assessing the learning goals of a significant cross section of ESL students.

Although we can look at an analysis of a formal survey such as this and arrive at some valid generalizations, we must be careful not to assume or presume the goals of all adult learners. Informal surveys by instructors can also be valuable in providing information on specific learner needs. An example of an informal survey might be to provide a list of twenty or more topics of interest to an ESL learner and ask him/her to choose the ten most interesting and then perhaps of those ten the three or four most important. The results will be both surprising and inconsistent within any given group. Content requests may range from the expected, i.e., learning about local transportation, to the unexpected, i.e., learning U.S. geography!

2) What am I going to teach?

After understanding and accepting learning needs, thought can then be given to what information, coping skills, and specific language should be incorporated to accomplish the goals. The "what" or content of an ESL lesson has been traditionally thought of as what language (i.e. grammatical structure) was to be practiced and internalized in a given lesson. In responding to learner's needs we must shift our emphasis from the language as an end result, to the learner and that language necessary to meet his/her stated goals. This is not to say that language structures are to be eliminated from an ESL class and all that we have learned about the English language is to take a secondary role. On the contrary, after establishing the context in which the learner is to use language, it is up to us to carefully analyze the language needed to function in the given context. In analyzing the language actually used in a given situation it is important to consider the real language used by native speakers in that context and those aspects of the real language the learner needs to know to be functionally competent.

If we accept a structural approach to language learning, it is at this point then we can bridge the gap between structure and coping skills. Thus, if the predetermined objectives of an ESL curriculum are based on structural items, the learner generated contexts could be used to integrate the linguistic items and the coping skill. Since most ESL programs in which there are several levels of instruction determine placement and movement of students from one level to another on mastery of structural items, and since a structural syllabus is generally accepted, using that framework to integrate coping skills and language is appropriate at any level of ESL instruction. The particular context of learning how to fill out job applications, for example, can be adapted to all ESL levels: The difference would not be the material used but rather the amount of linguistic knowledge expected of the learners. It is tempting to dismiss coping skills at the beginning level as being too difficult for the student just starting to learn English. However, by dealing with real language and student interest, even a beginning ESL lesson can integrate language and real situations that would be meaningful to the learner and a representation of actual language.

3) How am I going to do this?

After determining the need, the language and context of an ESL coping skills lesson, the process for presenting it to the learner is identified. In adult education and more specifically in CBE, the goals of the learning process are "public." Adults want to know the outcomes of instruction. By including the learner in the determination of goals, both the teacher and the learner will have focus. How the learner will be using the language -- orally, in written form, and whether in an active or passive role -- will determine the modality of instruction. The learner should also be given the opportunity to explore alternate routes to acquire competency. Group work, individual work, reading, writing and oral work are examples of different learning strategies and modalities which should be made available. ESL instructors have always had to take into account different learning styles and modes in order to work with heterogeneous groups, and the CBE process is no exception to this demand.

We must also now examine the role of the teacher in the CBE process. Various language teaching methodologies, including most prominently The Silent Way[3] and Counseling Learning/Community Language Learning[4] have challenged the more "traditional" role of the teacher and have made us more aware of the learner and his/her responsibility in the learning process. The concept of the teacher as the all-knowing role model and the student as the imitator of the teacher has been challenged by many instructors who accept their responsibility to be more of a facilitator or helper in the learning process. In the ESL class this means letting the learner work on the language in an active role when the goal is active knowledge of the language, and providing opportunities for the learner to develop passive language knowledge when that is the goal.

The ESL instructor will always be the "knower" of the linguistic items, but as in all adult learning situations, the adult brings certain knowledge and skills to contribute to the learning process. In an ESL/CBE program, the role of the "teacher" is to accept and recognize the adult learner's contribution and to be ready to admit his/her own content limitations. An "instructor-facilitator" of a CBE program cannot be expected to be an expert in all areas that his/her learners want to know about. The ESL/CBE facilitator does know what language is needed for functional competence and can learn to direct clients to acquire other information.

In sum, we have identified four important differences between the organization of a "traditional" ESL class and a "competency-based " one:

1) The "Content" of learning -- that context within which language is taught -- is learner-generated. The competency or coping skill to be learned along with the structure and vocabulary appropriate to the learner's level of language mastery is mutually determined by the instructor and the learner. This learning contract can be formal or informal. Just as any English structure can be taught within a variety

of contexts, so can the depth or completeness of the context be adjusted to suit language mastery level while meeting real language, real experiential, needs.

2) The "lessons" of learning -- those language concepts and skills leading to understanding of and fluency in English -- are treated not solely as ends in themselves but also as steps or activities leading to mastery of the competency. Thus, each structure learned and practiced has immediate application to the real world, with the emphasis placed on dealing with a specific facet of a strange culture.

3) The "testing" of learning -- those measures designed to assess skill mastery -- are insofar as possible competency-based. That is, the ideal "test" for a limited learning contract is the performance of a task or solution of a problem using appropriate learned language correctly.

4) The "teacher" of ESL experiences a distinct shift in role. While the teacher remains the expert -- the knower -- of language in the broad sense, he/she is relieved of the necessity of also being the master of content. In helping to design and carry out the learning contract, the teacher becomes a facilitator, not the exclusive source of content.

So, what does an ESL/CBE classroom look like? How does the group -- learners and teacher -- go about its daily business? An important difference here between "traditional" and "competency-based" classrooms is the expansion of sources of content: the resources of the community and, even more significantly, of the learners themselves will be used more extensively. Two kinds of classroom organization are obvious: learners can be grouped by language mastery level, or they can be grouped by areas of content interest.

In the first, then, learners will be working and helping each other in a specific content area but limited to the same level of language mastery; in the second, learners may be working to achieve functional competence in similar situations but will be performing at different levels of language ability. An ideal program of course, would allow for flexibility in organizing both ways for different purposes.

But few of us operate in ideal programs. What are the immediate implications of the CBE movement for ESL? For one thing, the teaching of coping skills -- what good teachers have always done -- is now legitimized by the educational establishment. And the CBE movement can help us to facilitate the learning (as opposed to teaching) of those coping skills in an organized fashion while remaining true to the principles of good language teaching.

While we are not yet capable in terms of materials and human resources of providing hands-on content to fit every level and every need, every program already has or can easily get a smorgasbord of content to offer! One mistake often made when organizing a CBE program is to think you have to have it all to offer right away. CBE is, after all, a process and so is CBE program organization. And although we'll probably continue to borrow and steal materials as we've always done, there are materials (and, more importantly, models) available to us now.[5]

Other immediate implications include: acceptance of the notion of public learning objectives; reemphasis on the transferability of skills; and a new look at the ongoing bilingual education controversy. These topics obviously cannot be dealt with here, but we should give them serious thought. Briefly, along with the acceptance of public learning objectives comes the acceptance of public teacher capabilities! Along with renewed proof of the transferability of academic skills comes new emphasis on problem-solving as a transferable behavior. And along with our determination to teach English and cultural functioning simultaneously comes the acceptance of a place for bilingual education, particularly on beginning levels.

91

What are the long-range implications of the CBE movement for ESL? The major trend in all of adult education today is toward the reorganization of most programs to implement competency-based instruction, assessment and reporting systems. Two approaches to competency-based education are now being implemented in varying degrees, the one dealing with pre-determined objectives, such as the APL schema, the other dealing solely with objectives generated by the learning contract. This latter approach is the one most likely to be adopted by ESL programs, since existing content curricula do not meet the language learning needs of ESL students.

Either way, with the recognition of the necessity for competency-based instruction in order to help all adult learners cope with the increasing demands of our society must come the acceptance -- from both within and without the field -- that ESL can no longer go on in isolation. Perhaps it is time to make ESL classrooms "public" and continue to recognize the needs of the adult ESL learner in a more organized way. The CBE process can help us with that. We have been coping but we can do better.

NOTES

[1] For a discussion of establishing CBE programs, see Paul G. Taylor and Joann Berg, "Administration Issues from the CBAE Perspective," in Proceedings of a National Invitational Workshop on Competency-Based Adult Education, Edited by Carol E. Kasworm and Buddy R. Lyle, Austin, TX: University of Texas, 1979.

[2] Jean W. Bodman and Susan C. Lanzano, "What ESL Students Want: a report of their opinions on coping skills in the classroom." 1978, Adult Education Resource Center, Jersey City State College, Jersey City, New Jersey 07305.

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[4] Curran, Charles A. Counseling-Learning: A Whole-Person Model for Education New York: Grune & Stratton, Inc., 1972.

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Education, Montclair State College, Upper Montclair, New Jersey 07043. This guide includes an important paper, "Teaching ESL for Communication Beyond the Schoolroom," by Susan C. Lanzano, a reprint of the Bodman and Lanzano report, and four model lessons in ESL and coping skills. For other ESL and coping skills materials suggestions, a bibliography is available from Joann LaPerla Berg, Adult Education Resource Center, Centers of Adult Continuing Education, Montclair State College, Upper Montclair, New Jersey 07043.

A SURVEY OF PARTICIPANTS OF THE NEW JERSEY LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION PROGRAMS

By

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INTRODUCTION

Life is not simple in terms of job selection or vocational preparation. Often it isn't enough to plan to do the kind of work one's parents do nor is it enough just to graduate from high school and then to hope for a good job.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that during the next decade only 20 percent of available jobs will require college degrees (Adkins, 1975).

This change in American education is creating new challenges for those beginning an occupation. Graduates are discovering that a diploma sometimes is not as marketable today as it was a few years ago. Employers want to know what skills a person has and how he can perform on a job. To the disadvantaged and undereducated adult gaining initial employment is even a more serious problem.

The multiple problems of disadvantaged adolescents and adults often make it difficult for them to take full advantage of their emerging training and employment opportunities. Some progress has been made in devising meaningful programs to teach vocational and basic reading and mathematics skills (Adkins, 1974). There has not, however, been a concomitant advance in finding ways to help disadvantaged students and workers learn the Life Skills -- the psychological and social skills for mastering the interrelated problems in living encountered in training, on the job, in the home, and in the community.

Although virtually every training and employment program for the disadvantaged has employed counselors to help students and workers deal more effectively with their problems in living, the relatively high percentage of premature terminations attributable to various psychological problems attests to the fact that counseling programs are not yet coping effectively enough with the needs of disadvantaged clients (Adkins, 1973). One reason why counselors have not been more successful is that the personal problems faced by their clients are numerous and complex. Another is that counselors often lack the appropriate experience, preparation and understanding of their clients (Adkins, 1970). However, an even more basic reason is that, lacking more effective tools, counselors have relied on non-instructional discussion methods in individual or group counseling as the primary means for helping to resolve difficulties and make appropriate plans.

On the basis of these and other observations a Life Skills program was developed in 1965 at the Training Resources for Youth program by Adkins, Rosenberg and Sharar in New York. In the ensuing nine years that followed that experience coupled with others led to the creation of the present Life Skills model. The Adkins Life Skills Employability Series is designed to help the disadvantaged adult choose, find, get and keep a job. It is a multimedia behaviorally oriented curriculum which utilizes video and audio tapes, articles, questionnaires, workbooks, role play exercises and other printed matter under the guidance of a trained group leader, a Life Skills Educator. Ten program units follow structured learning sequences based on a four stage teaching model and are designed to focus on specific employment and career problems faced by the adult learner:

1. Who I am and where I want to go?
2. Ten Occupational Fields: How Do I Explore Them?
3. Finding out about available jobs and training programs
4. People who know: using personal and professional contacts
5. Choosing among available jobs
6. Getting Myself Together
7. Developing a Vocational Plan
8. Looking Good on Paper
9. The Job Interview: How to be Effective
10. Is This Absence Really Necessary?

On February 4, 1975, Dr. Winthrop Adkins of Columbia University presented his "Life Skills Employability Series" to a selected group of New Jersey learning center directors and Resource Center staff. This meeting was held to review the materials and also gather the reactions for the possible implementation of the program in New Jersey.

Since reactions to the program were favorable, the program was installed at the following learning centers: Asbury Park Learning Center, Brookdale Learning Center, Hackensack Adult Learning Center, Jersey City Learning Center, Monmouth Adult Education Commission, Newark Adult Learning Center, Plainfield Adult Learning Center, Trenton Adult Learning Center and Woodbridge Adult Learning Center.

PURPOSE OF THE INVESTIGATION

The purpose of this investigation was to determine the effectiveness of the "Adkin's Life Skills Program" in providing its participants with the ability to choose, find, get and keep a job.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

There were two major objectives, each with several subobjectives. The objectives were:

1. To determine whether or not participants who completed the Life Skills programs had positive changes in their employment status.
    - 1.1 To determine the employment status of Life Skills participants after they completed the program.
    - 1.2 To determine if the Life Skills program helped participants obtain a job.
2. To determine whether or not specific factors influenced participants of the Life Skills Program in finding a job.
    - 2.1 To determine if length of time in the program helped participants obtain a job.
    - 2.2 To determine what units of materials were most helpful in obtaining a job.
    - 2.3 To determine if Life Skills participants are more satisfied with their new job.
    - 2.4 To determine the participants overall satisfaction with the Life Skills program in preparing them for employment.
    - 2.5 To determine the overall demographic characteristics e.g. race, sex, age and prior schooling of Life Skills participants.

PROCEDURES AND INSTRUMENTS USED

The population for the study consisted of all adults who enrolled in the Life Skills Programs at the seven learning centers and completed the program. A total population of 350 participants was surveyed during the period of May 1977-September 1977.

A questionnaire was developed to collect data concerning the employment status of participants during and upon completion of the program. Questions relating to the following categories were also included: vital statistics, prior schooling, demographic characteristics, length of participation, length of time to obtain a job as well as questions relating to the participants' satisfaction with the program were included. A pilot study was conducted to test the survey questionnaire and the collection methods. The questionnaire was revised in accordance with the pilot study results.

Mailing lists were obtained from the respective directors of the Life Skills Programs and a questionnaire accompanied by a cover letter was sent to each participant's home. A total of 183 questionnaires were initially received. In order to increase the size of the response another questionnaire along with a reminder note was sent one month after the first mailing. A total of 243 questionnaires were received, representing a 70% return.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Chi square analysis was employed to ascertain the significance of the difference among data received from male vs. female participants, high school vs. non-high school graduates, under 30 years of age vs. over 30 years of age. In the preparation of this study, $p = .05$ was selected as an adequate level of significance.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitations of the study were as follows:

1. The study was an ex post facto design; therefore, any changes in Life Skills Participants had already occured.
2. The study was limited to surveying participants who completed the Life Skills Programs during the Fiscal Year 1977.
3. National economic fluctuations were not considered.

ASSUMPTIONS

The assumptions made concerning the study were as follows:

1. The participant groups of each Life Skills program were homogeneous.
2. The participants surveyed were representative of the population.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

All respondents to this study were grouped according to 1) male, female; 2) high school graduate, non-high school graduate; 3) under 30 years of age and over 30 years of age.

This study of benefits attributable to Life Skills Program participation had two major objectives. The summary of findings was organized in regard to each of the study's objectives.

The first major objective was to determine whether or not participants who completed the Life Skills programs had positive changes in their employment status.

1.1 Significant chi square values were observed in regard to obtaining a job. Women were more likely to obtain a job than men (p. = .02), high school graduates were more likely to obtain a job than non-high school graduates (p. = .05). Participants under 30 were more likely to obtain a job than participants over 30 (p. = .02).
1.2 With regard to the Life Skills Program's helpfulness in obtaining a job, significant chi squares values were observed. Women were more likely than men to determine the Life Skills program as being helpful in obtaining a job (p. = .005). High school graduates were more likely to determine the Life Skills program as being helpful (p. = .003) than non graduates. Participants under 30 were more likely to find the program as being helpful than those over 30 (p. = .005).

The second major objective was to determine whether or not specific factors influenced participants of the Life Skills Program in finding a job.

2.1 A significant chi square value was observed in both men and women who participated longer in that they were more likely to obtain a job

(p. = .02, p. = .03) respectively. High school graduates who participated longer than non-high school graduates were more likely to find a job (p. = .03).

2.2 All participants indicated that units 8 - Looking Good on Paper and 9. - The Job Interview: How to be Effective, were most helpful.

2.3 A significant chi square value was observed with men being more satisfied on their new job than women (p. = .02), high school graduates were more satisfied with their new job than non-high school graduates (p. = .05).

2.4 A significant chi square value was observed with women being more satisfied than men with regard to the Life Skills Program in preparing them to obtain a job (p. = .05). High school graduates were more satisfied with the program than non-high school graduates (p. = ..03). Participants over 30 years of age were more satisfied with the program than participants under 30 (p. = .05).

2.5 Frequency data indicated that the majority of Life Skills participants were white, female, under the age of 30 and had completed high school.

CONCLUSIONS

As a result of this study, it is concluded that:

There is evidence to suggest that participation in the Life Skills Programs in New Jersey's Adult Learning Centers has had a positive effect in increasing the employability skills of participants in obtaining a job. The Life Skills participant who studied more units of material and thereby increased his employability skills was also more likely to obtain a job.

Successful completion of high school or the G.E.D. suggests that attainment of this level of education appears to give a person an edge over a non high school graduate in obtaining a job. High school completion is associated primarily with the white female population under the age of 30.

Overall reaction to the Life Skills Program by the participants found the program to be very helpful in preparation for employment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of this study, it is recommended that:

1. The Life Skills program recruit more males, minority groups and older students in need of increasing their employability skills.

2. Former Life Skills participants who started but did not complete the program should be encouraged to return to the program.
3. Participants who do not possess a high school diploma should also be encouraged to enroll in a high school equivalency instructional program or an adult high school program.

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COMPETENCY-BASED ADULT EDUCATION IN PRE-GED AND GED PROGRAMS: A CASE STUDY OF THE LOUISIANA EXPERIENCE

by

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Introduction

When the results of the Adult Performance Level study were announced by the University of Texas in 1973, it immediately took the forefront as the most significant development in the adult education program since the advent of federal funds in 1965. Essentially, the Adult Performance Level Project redefined the concept of literacy, developed an instrument to assess the functional literacy of adults and, thus, specified those competencies which were functional to adult life. The overriding implication of the study for adult education was that these competencies would become the core of objectives for adult basic education programs.

However, the reality of making the transition from research to practice presents numerous obstacles. The degree to which new approaches, ideas, concepts, etc. are infused into any existing system is directly dependent upon the status of current programs, with reference to structure, personnel, future directions and developments, and credentialing and evaluation criteria. Initially, misunderstanding surfaced due to the fact that many practitioners viewed the Adult Performance Level Study as a new program, a new acronym, a complete and different system of instructional approach, content, materials; a system intended to replace existing ABE instructional activities.

Differences of opinion immediately surfaced between competency- and skill-based advocates. Skill-based proponents were hesitant to accept the premise that the skills intermingled in a competency-based instructional approach were sufficient to

101

provide the student with adequate improvement in basic skills. They were also concerned that the skills within this framework were sufficient to enable the student to meet existing credentialing requirements and evaluation purposes. Additionally, the competency-based assessment and evaluation instruments were not readily available. Those instruments that were accessible were viewed with a great degree of skepticism with relation to their validity and their future acceptance by the general public outside the field of competency-based education.

Compounding this entire situation was the fact that competency-based adult education activities would represent change. Adult education instructional personnel had been trained for the past few years in employing individualized skill-based instructional techniques, had refined their approaches through years of experience, and were just beginning to feel comfortable with these approaches.

Although numerous other opinions, comments and other points of view have been debated concerning the competency-based/skill-based issue, the crucial concern for influencing present programs was the need for practical and meaningful information, researched and documented to give validity to competency-based approaches. The dominant issue of this documentation and research, however, must focus its response to the practitioners -- not necessarily to the theorist or the professional researcher. This situation was especially true for adult education personnel in Louisiana. These practitioners had been trained specifically in skill-based instructional approaches through the implementation of individualized prescription programs of instruction for adult students. This concern was the key focus for the Louisiana consideration of competency-based adult education.

Initial Efforts

It was recognized that specific practical activities and cooperative efforts must be undertaken. Those activities, begun in 1975-76, focused on pioneering efforts at implementation of APL curriculum by volunteering local education agencies throughout the state on a self-funded basis -- a testimony to the interest of the educators in APL activities. The efforts became more organized with the coordination of two funded projects -- the Region VI APL Curriculum Development Project funded by the University of Texas, and the Louisiana Tech University Research and Curriculum Development Project. Through this collaborative effort, ten local education agencies in Louisiana utilized the University of Texas APL testing program, instructional materials, and procedures in their existing adult education programs. These programs had the distinction of being one of the first state efforts to conduct comparative studies involving adult literacy instructional programs.

The first major coordinating effort in this project was a statewide conference in 1976. The conference was planned to determine the extent of activities needed to provide orientation to those personnel interested in piloting the APL materials, and to disseminate all procedures and materials to be used with the APL activities. As a result of this conference, ten local school systems enthusiastically agreed to participate in this initial effort.

As a second coordinating effort, fifteen local adult education personnel from the same school systems were selected to assist the Tech staff in the development of an APL curriculum guide for Louisiana. Another phase of this endeavor involved development of the Tri-State Conference on APL in cooperation with the Louisiana and Arkansas State Departments of Education, The University of Arkansas, and the University of Texas APL Project. This conference of educators provided the initial ideas for development of curriculum guides around each of the five APL general knowledge areas. These ideas were extended and refined at a three-day workshop during which fifteen local adult education personnel, the Tech staff, members from the State Department and from the University of Texas worked to develop an APL curriculum guide for instructional use in Louisiana. The curriculum guide, approximately 400 pages in length, was finalized in May, 1976, and made available for dissemination.

The product of these collaborative workshops, the Louisiana Tech APL Curriculum Guide, is organized as a series of task modules for each general knowledge area of APL. Each module follows the same format as identified below.

1. A stated instructional goal.
2. Set of specific performance objectives.
3. A series of learning tasks for each objective. The tasks, designed to help the learner attain the desired competencies, are presented in categories of teacher activities, learner activities, and resources.

The APL activities initiated as a result of the first coordinating efforts in the various systems were varied with some programs offering more extensive activities than others. These pilot sites successfully stimulated "hands on" activities in local ABE programs with the APL Survey and APL instructional activities. These preliminary activities placed the state in a much better position to follow through and attempt to develop a structured study concerning state implementation of APL based curriculum for adult programs. Basically, the following accomplishments may be cited as a result of the 1975-76 pilot activities:

1. An APL curriculum guide designed specifically for Louisiana's adult program was developed.
2. A variety of instructional materials based upon APL objectives were developed.
3. Testing results, although limited, indicated that adult education students in traditional adult classes have not received instruction in all areas of competencies as designated by the APL objectives; and although adults are improving their grade level achievement, they may not be mastering those specific competency-based skills needed to successfully cope with today's society.
4. A greater realization of the potential of APL based curriculum programs was acknowledged by those participating systems; and because of this, they were receptive to engaging in more structured activities concerning the pilot studies and the implementation of APL programs.

Second Year Focus

Based upon the recommendations of those local systems involved in the limited pilot activities conducted during 1975-76, the second year of the Louisiana APL Pilot Project sought to establish statewide coordination of all APL activities in cooperation with the University of Texas Region VI APL Project, Louisiana Tech University, and those local school systems involved in the pilot programs.

The overall objectives for the 1976-77 APL Pilot Project, entitled "Louisiana Adult Performance Level Pilot Study - A Comparative Analysis of APL Competency-Based Instructional Programs," were as follows:

1. Initiate a structured, comparative study utilizing experimental and control groups in local adult education programs to compare the credibility of APL competency-based instructional programs with traditional adult education instructional activities in an effort to determine--
    a. correlation between grade level achievement and APL objectives;
    b. impact on the retention of adult students;
    c. any cost factor differential between APL instructional activities and traditional programs;
    d. strengths and weaknesses of the APL instructional programs;
    e. students' evaluation of APL based programs.
2. Continue APL pilot activities engaged in the development of specific instructional materials based upon APL objectives.
3. Continue regional coordination of APL activities in an effort to share and disseminate materials and information and to utilize the expertise of the national APL staff in the implementation of pilot activities and training of local staff.
4. Develop expertise on the staff of a state university in the specific area of the Adult Performance Level Study.

As the first step in attaining the objectives, a Fall workshop was conducted by Louisiana Tech for the purposes of project orientation, distribution of materials, and organization of the instructional programs of the ten local pilot sites. A monitoring workshop was conducted in Spring, 1977, where project site reports and staff presentations were given. Final evaluation and recommendations were made at a closing workshop, held in July, 1977.

The sample for the study was reduced since four sites were discontinued because of lack of administrative support from the local level, scheduling problems, and student reaction to the study. However, with the six local programs continuing, a total of 236 students were involved in the study. Only those students who had both pre and post test scores were included in the final analysis.

Adults enrolled in both the experimental and control groups were administered two tests -- pre-California Achievement Test (CAT) and the Adult Performance Level (APL) Survey. Preference was given to those adults who scored below the ninth grade on the initial CAT for inclusion in the study. The study was conducted for not less than six months at each site.

The program of study for the experimental group (APL) related lessons to competencies necessary for meeting the requirements of adult living today as identified in the original APL study at the University of Texas. The control group participated in a traditional adult education program. Records were kept and updated by teachers at each site.

Basically, the experimental APL groups outperformed the traditional control groups in grade level achievement, APL upgrading, retention, and average hours of attendance. The results of this study dispelled many of the apprehensions that the skill-based oriented adult education teachers had regarding the viability of an APL instructional approach providing adequate skill-based achievement. The overall response from teachers, students, and local supervisory personnel involved in the study was very positive toward the content of an APL instructional program and was evaluated as being more meaningful to the everyday needs of adults.

Based upon the findings of the study and the recommendations of those local adult education personnel involved in the APL pilot activities, it was felt that the last major hurdle which an APL instructional program should address itself to, before statewide training is initiated, is the adult high school GED preparation program. It was also the consensus of the pilot personnel that the APL curriculum guide should be revised and improved based upon the pilot activities and that activities should be initiated to develop a statewide training and dissemination program on APL for all local adult education personnel.

Third Year Activities

Based upon these recommendations, the third year of pilot activities was initiated through the Louisiana Tech Adult Performance Level Research and Curriculum Design Project for 1977-78. The project involved the assistance of the University of Texas APL Project and five participating local school systems. The main goals of the project were:

1. to compare the traditional adult education program with the APL program in regard to GED testing (preference was given to adult students who scored above the ninth grade on the initial CAT for inclusion in the study);
2. to revise and improve the Louisiana Tech APL Curriculum Guide for distribution throughout the state to local adult education programs.

In implementing the project, Louisiana Tech conducted three APL training workshops during the year. One workshop, conducted at the initiation of the pilot activities, was to train local personnel involved in the pilot programs in the organization of their local pilot study and in the utilization of the total APL curriculum system, including the University of Texas instructional modules and the Louisiana Tech APL Curriculum Guide.

The second workshop was held for the purpose of assisting the local pilot personnel in finalizing all results of the pilot activities and assimilating the information for the final report and recommendations.

One statewide workshop presented a finalized report on all Louisiana APL activities. The program was designed to present a summary of all APL pilot and research results, disseminate copies of the revised APL Curriculum Guide, and to preview the APL awareness/orientation training program. Invitations were extended to all local school systems in Louisiana interested in initiating APL training activities for local adult education personnel for the following year.

The 1977-78 Louisiana APL research was conducted in four sites in Louisiana with students achieving above the 9.0 level on the CAT. Five hundred and sixteen students were involved in the final analysis. Students involved became part of either the control group or the experimental group. The control group received instruction in the traditional GED adult education program while the experimental group was taught through an APL-based program. Division of students into groups allowed a comparison to be made of the percentage of dropouts from each program. Students recommended for GED did so by meeting either the traditional standard (13.0 on the total battery of the CAT with no subject matter area below 12.0) or the alternative APL standard (34 or above on the ACT and 10.0 on the CAT). Students could be recommended for GED testing through either standard, regardless of group association.

Analysis of data indicated by observation that not only did the highest percentage of initial recommendations for GED testing come through the APL criteria, but this standard also produced the highest percentage of students passing GED of those initially recommended. It was also found that the dropout rate was lower for the group receiving APL instruction than for the group receiving traditional instruction.

There was general agreement that in Louisiana's program, APL did not fit students functioning above the ninth-grade level in the GED program as well as it had been received with ABE students functioning below the ninth-grade level. Basic instructional guides for initial utilization by teachers in implementing an APL instructional program are needed, coupled with extensive teacher training activities.

Summary

The recommendations stemming from the results of the three years of Louisiana APL pilot activities were as follows:

1. that a new assessment instrument to evaluate adult performance level criteria be developed or obtained for use in Louisiana;

2. that the 13.0 grade level requirement with no subject matter area less than 12.0 on a standardized achievement test be retained as Louisiana's qualifying criteria for recommendation of adult students to take the GED test;

3. that APL instructional materials and activities be integrated into the existing ABE program (students functioning below the ninth-grade level) and that an adult proficiency certificate be developed on the state level for issuance to those ABE students who successfully demonstrate proficiency in life-coping skills;

4. that the operational manual for implementing APL-based instructional activities in local adult education programs be utilized as the basic guide for teacher initiation of APL instructional activities in local ABE programs;

5. that the term APL or competency-based education be eliminated in reference to teacher training activities or specific references in curriculum material and that the concept be approached as simply that of improving adult basic education curriculum; and

6. that statewide teacher training activities be initiated to introduce APL concepts, materials, and techniques to all local adult education personnel. It is suggested that the program be coordinated with those higher education institutions in the state currently supporting adult education teacher training activities.

In addition to the overall recommendations, there were four major areas of concern recognized by the APL pilot project staff members as a result of the 1977-78 Louisiana Tech Project. The first area involved utilization of the APL Survey. Basically, the forty-item survey was a major weakness in the overall project activities because forty items were not adequate to accurately assess student competencies in life-coping skills and could not be used as a credentialing instrument; utilization of only one form of the test made retesting a problem; there was difficulty in the use of the test as a diagnostic instrument for prescribing an instructional program; and utilization of the survey instrument with those adults functioning above the ninth-grade level in the GED program was a problem due to the fact that the vast majority of the students scored above average on the initial examination or required very few instructional activities in order to score above average on the second test.

As far as overall student attitude was concerned, when given a choice of instructional approaches, students liked the APL alternative (as defined in the study); however, often the materials were poorly received. Utilization of the University of Texas APL Modules involved too extensive an instructional program for students functioning on a 9.0 grade level and above who needed only brief refresher activities in APL content areas. The content of the APL material was viewed as being very meaningful to the adult student. However, most students requested more instructional activities in specific skill areas such as math and language in order to adequately prepare for the GED test.

Another area of concern focused on teacher training. Three of the four pilot sites involved personnel who had received previous APL training and were involved in prior pilot activities. The one pilot site in which the teachers had not received specific APL training reinforced the fact that most adult education teachers were ill-prepared to function effectively in an APL based curriculum. It was apparent that more individual attention was required when teachers were neither adequately prepared nor had available instructional resources at hand to implement an APL based program. It was concluded from the experience that sufficient time be allotted for proper integration of APL content and instructional approaches into the existing programs.

The national APL study has had a tremendous impact on all areas of adult education. It re-defined the traditional concept of "literacy" in today's society and substantiated the need for competency-based instructional activities, materials, evaluation and credentialing criteria, in local adult education programs.

Louisiana's APL pilot projects laid the groundwork for statewide implementation of competency-based instructional offerings in local adult programs. If for no other reason, these pilot activities must be viewed as successful; for without these initial efforts, competency-based adult education programs would not have been as easily accepted and/or incorporated by local adult educators.

THE CURRENT STATUS OF CBAE RESEARCH

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In adult education Competency Based Education (CBE) is frequently equated with life coping skills instruction and/or program which award secondary certification for demonstrated performance. Thus, the term is applied to many different kinds of efforts and contexts, some of which comply to a greater extent than others with a definition of CBE.

For the purpose of this chapter, Competency Based Adult Education is defined as an educational process which has as its goal the development of ability to perform known and agreed upon outcomes. Completion of the process is based on student demonstration of those outcomes rather than on time. This definition draws heavily from that of Spady; in a further agreement with Spady's perspective, CBAE refers to ability to function in life roles.[1] Implementation of a CBAE program includes: 1) a precise statement of outcomes as competencies and criteria for demonstrating competencies; 2) alternative provisions for learning that are directly related to the outcome; 3) performance based determinations of competence; 4) responsiveness to student needs and life situations.

Research related to the CBAE movement has concentrated on identifying and measuring competencies. Though some data regarding the effects of instructional programs have been collected, they rarely fit the rigid parameters of carefully controlled quantitative research designs. In examining the data it is clear that most of them are derived from programs which have implemented one or more facets of CBAE rather than a total process. In some instances the sole facet is the provision of instruction related to life roles within a basic skills program.

The Competencies

Determining competencies necessary to social functioning is a difficult and complex task. Researchers are faced with the problems of determining how to find out what the competencies are and which are really necessary. Performance levels which are a valid indication of successful life functioning must then be determined.

The most influential study in CBAE is the Adult Performance Level Study (APL).[2] Funded in 1971 to specify the functional competencies related to economic and educational success in today's society and to develop devices for assessing those competencies, the APL research produced both a set of competency objectives and test items. Procedures used to develop the competency objectives included a literature search, a survey of state and federal agencies and foundations, regional conferences on adult needs and interviews with undereducated and underemployed persons. The objectives developed have since been used by other researchers, curricula developers and publishers, while the test items have been turned over to the American College Testing Program (ACT).

Perhaps the major contribution of the APL study is its concept of competency as the integration of skills and knowledge rather than as a set of isolated skills or bits of information. The development of competency statements within a matrix of five knowledge areas intersecting with the basic skills of communication, computation, problem solving and interpersonal relations defines competency as more than ability to read, compute, or write; it is the ability to apply and synthesize relevant skills and information toward a more encompassing goal.

While many adult educators accept the APL list unquestionably, others are concerned about its inclusiveness and applicability to specific populations. Some question the procedures used to identify competencies. Many of the validation studies have been undertaken as a first step in APL curricula development for states or individual programs. These studies primarily assess responsiveness to statements based on the APL objectives and include only students and/or staff in ABE programs. As such, the results indicate perceptions of need or interest of those groups. While receptivity to certain topics of functional instruction is indicated, receptivity to a CBE model may still be questioned.

Studies conducted in New Jersey, Region X, Pennsylvania, the Southeast, and Alaska,[3] as well as in a number of cities and towns, are of this type. Though there are variations in the specific procedures and the range of competencies used for collecting the data, the common model is to develop a list of statements based on the APL objectives or steps subsumed under each objective, to devise a system of response, and then assess the reaction of students and possibly staff to the need or interest for each statement. In some cases the APL or a basic skills test is also administered to students to determine the relationship between perceived necessity and ability.

Self perceptual methods have limited usefulness for validating that certain competencies are generally necessary to function successfully in this society. A respondent may not deem a competency or skill necessary because she/he already is satisfied with current capability (e.g., already has a driver's license), has not yet encountered the need (e.g., obtaining credit), or developed beyond the need (e.g., birth control).

Such studies are useful in fulfilling their purpose for making curricula decisions. The results, however, are appropriate only to students already enrolled in ABE programs; those students who, by and large, enter programs anticipating and receiving basic skills, ESL or GED instruction. It is therefore not surprising that learning the basic skills is rated as a higher priority than life skills by respondents in these studies. Since students are receptive to learning life skills so long as that instruction is related to their initial perception of the program's purpose, attempts are made to integrate life applications into the basic skills sequence. While practical, given the current status of ABE/GED programs and certification routes for adults, this approach dilutes the emphasis on sequential development and synthesis of skills inherent in CBE.

Other researchers have taken different approaches to identifying the competencies necessary for successful social functioning. Adkins used a counseling interview technique to collect information regarding the psychological and social living needs of 258 enrolled and potential ABE participants in Connecticut. Qualitative analysis of the statement resulted in seven problem clusters:

Occupational and career problems
Problems in living in the community
Problems of personal growth and development
Problems in relating to others
Medical and health problems
Marriage and family problems
Problems of being a parent

Each cluster is further divided into subproblem areas.[4]

A project to identify the values, knowledge and skills necessary to be a competent economic manager of family resources was completed in Utah. A unique aspect of this study was the attempt to categorize competencies according to life-cycle and life-style stages. The resultant list of competencies was derived from a literature search which included an examination of data on expenditure patterns from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and information from the Utah Division of Consumer Affairs to identify prominent consumer frauds, as well as information on life stages. The demographic and cultural uniqueness of Utah residents was considered in selecting the final list of consumer competencies. The researchers noted the limitations of available data and their applicability to Utahans, which necessitated conclusions based on researcher judgment.[5]

In California a study to determine necessary functional competencies and to assess the needs of adults in that state is currently underway. A preliminary survey of 47 federal, state and local government agencies had indicated that while many of the knowledges, skills and tasks in APL were perceived as necessary by representatives of these agencies, there were others considered missing or underemphasized. Statements were often specific to an agency concern, i.e., those involved with the elderly thought it vital for the aged to know how to secure their discounts and entitlements. The need to develop attitudes, such as a positive attitude toward preventive health care, was also frequently stated.

To identify competencies needed in California, an extensive literature review was undertaken. From this literature review a list of general competencies was generated and organized into a conceptual framework. Specific statements for each general competency were developed by a panel of experts, then extensively reviewed, rewritten and edited. This process resulted in the following five categories: Cultural, Economic, Health and Safety, Interpersonal and Social-Political. Each category is further divided into subcategories with specific competency statements for each subcategory.[6]

The National Center for Research in Vocational Education at Ohio State University is currently conducting a study to identify necessary competencies in Occupational Knowledge and Consumer Economics. The initial draft of competency statements was developed after a review of those produced by others. These were then rated by experts. Further input into the final listing will include field ratings by random samplings of adults, twelfth graders, employers, and K-12 teachers. Respondents will be asked where competencies should be learned and how important each competency is.[7]

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratories is endeavoring to characterize the situation-specific uses of literacy skills of people in local communities. Literacy requirements can then be related to an individual's roles and life activities. Techniques for assessing literacy in specific settings will also be developed.

The conceptual framework and research methods employed in this project will be useful to others seeking to determine the literacy needs of adults in other locations.[8]

Examination of the various efforts to identify necessary competencies indicates that there are some commonalities in the general categories. The major addition to the five APL knowledge and basic skills areas is a cultural component. Community Resources generally receives a low priority in ABE program related studies and is usually not singled out as a separate component in other studies. For the most part, though, the differences in various lists are in titles, emphasis, and organization. Many of the same tasks or aspects of competency are common to several lists, though their placement within the lists varies. This similarity is partially due to the influence of the APL research on later efforts.

Because the different studies sought to identify competencies from different perspectives, the concept of necessity has been applied to external, social or community necessity as well as to individual or subgroup need. Procedures used in the different studies include:

1. asking people what they need to know or are interested in learning;
2. asking people to respond to a list of pre-specified competencies;
3. collecting literature and information from a variety of sources;
4. asking experts or providers of services to adults to indicate what adults generally, or clients of a service, need to be able to do;
5. analyzing what people do in relationship to performing certain roles or activities;
6. administering tests to determine areas of weakness.

The results of the various studies highlight the fact that a specific competency is rarely applicable to all people. Geographic location, sex, age, ethnic background, life stage and other factors affect both the individual and social perception of necessity. There is also a tendency to consider competencies possessed by most people in a sample group as not necessary for functioning in this society.

Measuring Competency

Procedures for assessing competency in life roles currently include paper and pencil objective tests and various types of performance indicators. Of the paper and pencil tests, the APL Survey and Content Area Measures are the most widely known and used in adult education. These assessments are comprised of multiple choice items rather than the open ended questions on the original APL project version.

To determine if performance on the original APL instruments was related to success in life, the Texas researchers calculated correlations between item performance and three success indicators: Income, Occupational Status, and Educational Level. Items which tended to correlate positively were selected for the interview schedules used in the national assessment of competency. The relationships between APL performance and the success indicators were used to develop conditional probabilities and to establish the three APL competency levels. However, no correlations were published in the final report.

Using the original Texas data and instrument, Cervero later computed the correlations between the success indicators chosen by the project and APL performance. The correlations ranged from .28 for respondent's income to .56 for years of schooling. All correlations were significant at the .001 level. Cervero stated that, if one assumes that the survey has content validity and the indicators accurately measure success, it can be argued that the APL assesses functional competence.[9]

Griffiths and Cervero, among others, have questioned the use of the APL indicators. Family income and chief wage earner's income, they assert, may not be accurate indications of success; for example, is a family with two wage earners more successful than one with only one wage earner? They also point out that the APL research was intended to provide an alternative scale to years of schooling as an indication of educational attainment.[10]

Griffiths and Cervero further questioned whether the test assesses five separate skills or five separate knowledge areas. Cervero pursued this question by completing a factor analysis of the Texas APL Survey. His findings suggest that reading, computation and writing account for a substantial proportion of the variance in APL test scores, with reading accounting for the greatest proportion. Items did not cluster according to the content areas they were intended to measure.[11] In a factor analysis of the ACT/APL Survey all items correlated in the same direction, with correlations ranging from -.26 to -.70. When a two factor solution was computed the items did not group according to the skills or content areas they were designed to measure. Epps and Cervero argued that the one underlying assessed dimension is reading and that the second factor is not identifiable.[12]

There is further evidence that reading ability is substantially related to APL performance. Informal observations of program personnel indicate that ABE students with poor reading skills have difficulty with the APL tests. Cervero found a correlation of .81 (.89 corrected for attenuation) between the ACT/APL Survey and the new GED tests.[13] He attributes this high correlation to the emphasis on reading in both measures. It could be further noted that both include recognition of correct writing and math skills, and that the new GED contains some life applications. In a second study Cervero found a correlation of .49 between the ACT/APL and the old GED. Since the group on which the data were collected was more homogeneous than in the previously mentioned study, Cervero computed what the correlation for the two tests would be if the variance of scores were larger. The resultant correlation of .80 was almost identical to the previously cited correlation.[14]

Flaherty found a .41 correlation between the ACT/APL Survey and the reading comprehension subtest of the Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE),[15] Level M, and a .36 correlation for only the APL reading items and the TABE. In this study students read only the APL sections necessary for completing the reading items. This factor and the fact that only the general comprehension subtest of TABE was used may have accounted for the lower correlations. Flaherty further suggested that these low correlations may have been due to differences in the applications of reading skills on the two tests. However, the possibility may have been that when non-essential reading is eliminated as a task in taking a functional competency test, the correlation with general reading is lower, and different abilities may be measured.

While high reliability coefficients are reported for total ACT/APL Survey and content area measures, the methods for computing reliability "are estimates of internal consistency; that is, they are indications of the extent to which the items on a test or subtest measure the same domain."[16] The publishers state that the moderate inter-correlations among content sub-areas and among the skills indicate that each content area or skill contributes something unique to the total domain of functional competency. Their caution regarding the interpretation of reliability coefficients may, however, be more to the point. It is suggested that total Survey scores are very reliable global indicators of functional competence.[17]

A more conservative perspective is that the instruments are appropriate measures of ability to gather information that may be related to functioning competently.

Competency means that a person can do something. In life there is rarely one right choice suitable for every person in every situation. Moreover, there is usually more than one way to realize a desired situation. Though basic skills are used to acquire or impart information to assist in making a decision or reaching a goal, there are often alternative avenues for getting or giving that information. For example, a person may complete his/her own income tax return, or gain assistance from a friend or agency. It is doubtful that consideration for these factors can be built into objective tests as they currently exist. While use of an objective instrument is far more practical in programs that cannot reward student efforts with a diploma, this method may better assess selected tasks that could, but may not necessarily, be used to reach an outcome rather than ability to realize that outcome. As such, the tests can serve a valuable function in adult education, so long as we are clear about what is measured.

Because of limitations of the multiple choice format, Slater and Nafzinger[18] have suggested using applied performance tests to judge ability to deal with practical life problems. Such procedures are intended to approximate reality so that integration of the required sub-skills can be assessed. One potential procedure is the development of simulations.

Programs which base judgment of competencies on a variety of performance indicators exist in adult education. For example in the New York State External High School Diploma Program, proficiency in 64 generalized competencies is assessed through five major task assignments, such as selecting an appropriate apartment. The generalized competencies are skills which are considered necessary to further learning, employment, and daily life functioning and could be applied to a number of different goals. The five task assignments require the application and integration of the skills to adult related activities. Further requirements must be met in either occupational/vocational, academic, or specialized skills before the diploma is awarded. Demonstration of competence may involve documentation of prior activities, performance on relevant tests, evaluation of performance or a product judged by experts.[19] Procedures used in the New York State program have been adopted by other programs. In some cases performance is equated to credits.

As yet there is no published set of performance indicators that can readily be used in programs across the country. Individual programs tend to develop their own procedures, which again may assess alternatives and the integration of skills to a varying extent. Standards for satisfying competency requirements also vary. Data regarding the relationship of test scores on an objective test and actual or simulated performance levels are not available.

The Effects of Instruction

A few programs reported data regarding the effects of life skills instruction. Programs in Louisiana, New England, Illinois, Alabama, and New Hampshire report positive and significant gains in student APL Survey performance after taking part in an instructional program.[20] In each of these programs instruction varied considerably. There also appeared to have been varying degrees of emphasis on basic skills. Louisiana and Illinois reports provided data which indicate increases in general reading ability. In Illinois this gain was attributed to systematic instruction of both basic and life skills. In the previous year there had been less emphasis on reading instruction and reading test score gains were substantially lower for the APL group.

Only the Louisiana study reported comparison data with students not receiving APL instruction. Gains on both basic skills and the APL instruments were significantly higher for those students receiving APL instruction. Further analysis of the score changes indicated that, considering the amount of instructional time, the APL group's per hour basic skills increase was significantly greater while the per hour gains for APL were not. The significant reading gains may have been due to an emphasis on those skills in instruction.[21] This finding suggested that teaching basic skills interrelated with life applications of those skills may have improved general reading ability more than did general reading instruction approaches.

The results of the data were not conclusive. Gains reported came from programs attempting systematic life related instruction for the first time; score increases may have been due to the Hawthorne effect. On the other hand, the instruction was implemented under less than optimal conditions. Teachers were uncomfortable with some of the APL topics and had insufficient resources. There was also insufficient information regarding the correspondence between what was taught and what was assessed by the APL Survey. Then too, APL Score gains may have largely reflected increased basic skills ability.

Qualitative data from programs, however, provided support for the perception that life related instruction had implications for students beyond the classroom. Invariably, students reported that they felt more capable and confident in handling various life situations. Acquisition of a diploma, which assisted in upgrading or acquiring employment or entering educational and training programs, was frequently noted as a benefit to people in diploma programs. It was not clear whether it was simply attaining the degree or learning skills that made the difference. Anecdotal information, rarely available or systematically collected, provided the most telling evidence of the positive effect of this type of curriculum. Informal conversations with teachers and students indicated that students frequently received help in dealing with their specific problems or acquiring knowledge which helped them make a decision. This may have been a referral to an appropriate agency or assistance in writing a letter. In other instances students used the information provided to change a behavior, e.g., opening a bank account.

It further appeared that more people who take part in life skills instruction tended to stay in the program than did those in general basic skills tracks. Figures from Louisiana, New York, Texas and Iowa supported this observation.[22] Additional side effects of implementing life skills instruction were reported from several programs. Invariably, instruction spread to other program efforts. Teachers became more sensitive to the non-basic skill needs of students, and the range of assistance provided to students was broadened. It seemed clear that these efforts affected staff perceptions regarding the nature of basic education programs. Whether the programs were truly competency based or not, students appeared to be receptive and to benefit from current efforts.

Conclusions

Competency statements, measurement of competency and ascertaining the effects of instruction are intricately related. Thus far, research efforts to identify necessary competencies provide useful information which has assisted programs in implementing functional instruction. To better identify the desired outcomes of that instruction, however, further exploration of the best procedures for determining necessary competencies is needed. Using these procedures, competencies most commonly needed as well as those needed by adults in specific communities, with specific life situations, can be determined. From such lists programs can then identify individual needs. Here, too, more valid and reliable ways to assist clients in becoming aware of those competencies needed immediately and those they may need in the near future must be developed.

It would also be useful to analyze competency statements to determine the generic processes inherent in those statements. Often, the same processes are applied in many competencies, e.g., identifying and using relevant agencies. Using this list and relating the list to the alternative applications of the processes, a valuable tool for recording student progress could be developed. An important program outcome would be evidence that participants can apply skills to new activities.

Procedures for assessing competency are still in an early developmental stage. The most commonly used test appears to measure life related applications of basic skills -- skills which are useful in attaining desired situations and in functioning competently. Because paper and pencil methods are more feasible than acutal performance tasks for programs which cannot offer certification or have limited amounts of participant time, further development of objective assessment procedures should be pursued.

To assist in developing paper/pencil and performance instruments, information regarding the efforts of individual programs should be exchanged. An attendant issue is the determination of the competent behaviors and standard of performance required for demonstrating a competency. While such requirements may vary from location to location, they should be linked to levels of functioning actually necessary for living in those areas. The fact that there are alternative routes for gaining and demonstrating a competency should also be recognized in the procedures used.

The further development of competency statements, assessment devices and standards will better enable programs to implement the CBE process and to determine the effects of that education. There is a need to conduct more studies not only to determine the comparative effectiveness for increasing basic skills but to understand the broader effects of CBE functional instruction verses predominantly basic skills instruction. While self-perceptual reports are one source of information, it is necessary to gather more complete objective data regarding noticeable changes in people's behaviors. The process of CBE, if fully implemented, provides for the gathering of performance data as evidence of program completion. In addition information regarding the effect of learning on situations outside the educational program as well as long term effects are needed.

Competency Based Adult Education is in an early state of development, with current efforts representing only selected elements of a total process. While there is evidence to suggest that recent efforts have been beneficial for students, existing accomplishments should be reviewed in relationship to that total process.

Before a true estimation of CBE can be made, we must strive to improve the tools and practices of components, and then to implement programs which incorporate those components. The experiences and data amassed thus far provide for making decisions and determining directions for future efforts.

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127

COMPETENCY BASED ADULT EDUCATION: A METAMORPHOSIS IN LITERACY EDUCATION

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Introduction

An ancient Chinese proverb speaks to the value of educating starving individuals in the use of the fishing pole. Two actions are discussed. The first concerns short-term needs only; the second focuses on both short-term and long-term needs. While both actions are valuable, their processes and outcomes are quite different. These differences, as illustrated through the proverb, focus on the inherent dilemmas faced by adult literacy education.

Because of the varied beginnings and programmatic forms of adult education, there have been divergent opinions on 1) the role of adult education in relation to the undereducated adult, 2) the primary knowledge and skills for sufficient and necessary literacy, and 3) the best strategies in the teaching-learning process. With each teacher, each program and each student, there have evolved numerous combinations. However, most adult education activities have focused on short-term goals. Often this limited focus has not been by conscious design. Rather it has been created by extremely diverse clientele, their overwhelming need for immediate intervention, their significant variability in skills and knowledge levels, and their intermittent participation. It has also been perpetuated by programmatic discontinuity, minimal resources, limited staff development and support research.

Many adult educators believe that effective, relevant literacy education should incorporate both short and long term needs. These practitioners, teachers, curriculum developers and administrators are now examining a broader vision, a vision which incorporates the notion of functional literacy and the process of competency based education. As illustrated in these proceedings, many adult literacy educators and program administrators believe CBAE is an important and valuable addition to adult education.

CBAE: A Crucial Stage of Metamorphosis

Competency based adult education (CBAE) has gained prominence at a time of significant national and international need for effective adult literacy education. In both the public and private sector, literacy skills are discussed as an expectation unmet by current schooling systems. Further, such skills are believed to guarantee individual autonomy from societal welfare systems and to increase one's chances for survival within this highly technological society. CBAE provides one avenue of systematic instruction to respond to these significant needs.

CBAE has gained its major dynamic quality from the cohesion of functional literacy concepts and competency based learning processes. Both elements are not unique from prior educational activities. For many decades, the concept of functional literacy had been interwoven within varied adult education activities. Although not denoted as functional literacy, content material and learning activities had been used for immediate reinforcement and practical application to adults' daily activities. Effective adult education teachers had observed a correlation between relevant content/skills and improved retention of undereducated adults. In recent years, the concept of functional literacy has gained national significance through discussions regarding the nature and scope of illiteracy for educational and census purposes, through the research of the Adult Performance Level Project (APL), and through other significant projects such as Apperception Interactive Method (AIM) and life-coping skills programs.

From a different perspective, competency based education evolved from innovative theory and research in learning processes and educational delivery systems. Both traditional and vocational-technical systems had experimented with this behavior-oriented, focused outcome system. Although adult education had been concerned with goal achievement learning, e.g., passing the General Educational Development High

School Equivalency Test (GED), these activities had not presented the comprehensive, systematic, and validated competencies of current CBAE efforts. This metamorphosis of literacy education -- the fusing of functional literacy perspectives and competency oriented processes -- represents a new distinctive character to adult literacy education. This character of CBAE represents five unique qualities to the adult literacy movement.

Competency based adult education is a systematic effort to infuse basic skills development with functional literacy concepts of our society. Due to the fragmented, everchanging nature of adult literacy efforts, few programs and instructors could look beyond the basic teaching requirements of reading, speaking, writing, and computation skills. Teachers and programs, attempting to integrate functional literacy concerns into basic skills, did so in a very stylized way and with very specific clientele needs. The CBAE movement has created a new focus for experimentation, research and execution of an all encompassing approach to functional literacy. It has generated significant activity to integrate these concepts into the teaching of basic skills and into a competency-oriented program serving undereducated adults.

The competency based education process is grounded in research which defines a specific set of competencies and therefore outcomes for a learning experience. This research orientation emanates from the interaction of daily adult life activities and basic communication, problem solving and interpersonal skills. The defined competencies have a sense of credibility for the present and future activities of students. Further they add a new dimension of accountability for learning activities. These competencies define the "markers" of present and future levels of accomplishment. This research based assessment system is one of the greatest strengths of the movement. It offers a rational basis for curriculum development, for tracking the teaching-learning process, for identifying the eventual outcomes to impact upon the learner. It builds the short and long term focus into a sequential instructional process.

Both past and present adult literacy programs have often drawn heavily upon the perspectives and research of learning styles and cognitive development of children. In addition, undereducated adults often have been subjected to "elementary school teaching mannerisms and materials." Individuals in adult literacy education may be ignorant about basic skills and knowledge, but they are keenly aware of the difference that education means to them and their families. They do represent mature individuals who have experienced life and the autonomy of adulthood.

CBAE brings the adult life orientation to the content and process of adult literacy activities. Undereducated adults come to the literacy classroom with pressing needs and desires. They are sharply focused on the value and relevance of information which is responsive and has immediate application to their lives. Often they also come with suspicion and anxiety. Will this program maintain their dignity while giving them skills and information that society labels as "basic information for a child learner?" Will this process reinforce earlier classroom failure; will this new environment be insensitive to the undereducated adult's cultural background and values? CBAE, in its varied programmatic forms, offers the undereducated adult a process and content focused on adult life activities. The content and skill has been designed for immediate application and connection between the classroom and everyday life. In addition, the CBAE process discriminates the present level of knowledge and ability. Adult students can view themselves along a continuum of learning experiences. They can enter the learning process at their own level of ability. They can see a sequential development in their learning and systematically follow their own progress towards learning goals. This orientation offers a valuable form of continuing positive reinforcement through immediacy of learning activities, through secondary reinforcement by application in their daily lives, and through a developing sense of self awareness and control over the destiny of their learning activities.

Many adult education learning centers and programs have been characterized by their reactive, "emergency ward" orientation. Little time, energy and leadership is allotted for direct instructional program planning and curriculum development. Adaptability, flexibility, immediacy are the key stimulants for creation of learning goals, processes and evaluation. Beyond this fluidity of program instruction, intermittent attendance by adult learners also causes additional discontinuity of the teaching-learning outcome. CBAE offers the opportunity to structure continuity within adult literacy programs, to concentrate varied practitioner efforts and student involvement towards a holistic teaching-learning curriculum. With stated competencies and processes, teachers, administrators and students can jointly participate in defining the program and the teaching strategies. Continuing assessment and evaluation pinpoint specific areas for both student and curriculum development. Further, this curriculum and process provides a common point of reference for publishers of literacy materials and for professional in-service and graduate training programs regarding the focus and future requirements for adult literacy education programs. CBAE is stimulating a framework for serious research on the value and effectiveness of varied forms of adult literacy education and provides a concept and process that encompasses a total perspective of educating the illiterate adult.

Lastly, CBAE provides an approach which can accommodate the diversity of adult skill/content levels, the voluntary, self-oriented participation rates of learners, and the unique problems of assessment and evaluation of this diverse population. Adult literacy education has never had adequate and sufficient tools to match the learner with the instructional process. CBAE presents one valuable approach to aid instructor and students in customizing the teaching-learning process. The competency based approach and variable access provides for self-pacing, individualization, and skill level development of learning activities. It accommodates the voluntary, intermittent participation of adult students and teachers. It offers a continuous feedback mechanism for both student-teacher concerns and programmatic developments. Ideally, this teaching-learning process should be able to personalize content/skill level assessment and teaching to the unique characteristics of each adult learner.

These five distinctive qualities define the impact of a properly developed and implemented CBAE program. Each quality contributes to its forceful, dynamic relationship -- connecting the learner with the needed skill and knowledge. This movement towards CBAE, however, does not represent the solution, the panacea, for educating all undereducated adults. It is one evolving system of instruction which is intimately linked to the cultural/technological state of our culture and to specific clientele needs. CBAE offers one vital approach to a multi-dimensional eclectic system of adult literacy instruction.

Next Stage of Metamorphosis: Devolution

These proceedings have captured at one point in time, the thoughts, beliefs, knowledge and practices of representative CBAE programs in the United States. As one segment of many activities, these proceedings illustrate the excitement and frustration of commitment to a new process and the diverse impact and implementation of this process upon a variegated system of instruction and program delivery. These programmatic efforts also represent the past -- that which has occurred. The future of CBAE is focused on a stage of devolution, of passing on of the key principles and concepts to others and of creating the environment to experiment with areas untouched by both CBAE and non-CBAE literacy activities. In considering the future development of competency based adult education, several key issues should be addressed.

First, one of the most significant and pressing issues facing adult literacy education is the effective involvement and instruction of the hardcore unemployed, the geographically dispersed illiterate rural population, and the illiterate non-English speaking population. Current adult literacy efforts have had signigicant difficulty in developing appropriate strategies and relevant instructional approaches for these specific groups. CBAE programs have created a process and a model implemented predominantly within urban and suburban locations, serving participants who are typically English-speaking and semi-literate. The next step for CBAE programs, and probably a most difficult one, is to redefine initial instructional goals, entry level learner needs and value orientations as they relate to fundamental development of language as a desired tool for expression and of self-concept of the illiterate as a "learner." The hard-core unemployed and the other hard to reach illiterate populations require a unique programmatic design focused on their needs and orientations.

Secondly, since CBAE is based on a functional literacy approach, its continued relevance and value is intimately connected to the quality and conceptualization of research which defines and assesses functional literacy competencies. As noted by Fischer and Nyer, research on defining competencies and on assessment of competencies will continue to be a key focus for debate and for the creation of alternative models. Further, this functional literacy approach is heavily dependent upon the impact of generated societal change in redefining appropriate/relevant cultural behavior and necessary technological adaptations to life style and work skills. CBAE faces a continuing challenge to up-date and modify curricula and materials for future life role requirements. For example, most present CBAE curricula do not introduce the usage of pocket calculators or a basic understanding of computer systems in daily life interactions. Both of these examples illustrate the potential problems of technological innovation impacting upon individual knowledge and skill. If we desire continued relevance of CBAE programs, there must be the creation of an ongoing research component to identify new knowledge and skills and to develop definitions and assessment tools for these newly designated competencies.

Third, in analyzing the specific learning objectives and competencies of the APL curriculum and several other CBAE models, there is an obvious bias directed toward the young and middle-aged adult orientations. CBAE programs presume that present functional literacy skills have no age discriminating parameters. However, these curricula typically discuss skills relevant to the young and middle-aged, e.g., preparing for a first job interview, raising a family and considering family planning alternatives. Current research eloquently points out significant differences in life tasks and therefore varied functional demands upon differing age groupings. Unquestionably, there are significant needs for providing adult literacy education to those individuals who represent the high school drop out and the middle-aged undereducated of our society. However, present CBAE curricula covertly neglect the unique and specific functional literacy needs of the older adult. It should be noted that illiteracy rates are the highest in the group of 55 years of age and older; lowest socio-economic incomes are most predominant in this same group. From 1974 national statistics, only 6% of the participating adult literacy students were older adults. Future efforts in CBAE should focus one of its developmental thrusts towards creating a CBAE process oriented to the functional literacy concerns of the older adult.

Fourth, as was noted earlier in these proceedings, there are few adequate research and assessment devices applicable to adult learners. Development of varied cognitive, affective and psychomotor skills assessment instruments should be a top priority. The development of this instrumentation should also be reflective of the current nature of the CBAE process and be in concert with adult learner characteristics and variable levels of ability. In addition, the value of CBAE can only be measured with adequate short-term and long-term evaluation instrumentation which has sensitivity to the process as it relates to the undereducated. New CBAE evaluation formats and data-collection procedures need to be designed and implemented. Until there is adequate assessment and evaluation tools, no program can reasonably present its effectiveness in relation to another system.

Fifth, research on adult development and learning has been extremely limited. Ironically, we have a minimal amount of definitive knowledge about the characteristics of the undereducated -- the primary focus for CBAE efforts. There is a significant, fundamental need for research data on the motivational orientations, values, self-concept development and learning styles of the illiterate, undereducated adult. Further, there is a need to define the short- and long-term benefit of specific curriculum orientations for the undereducated adult. There are varied factions within adult education who question the merit of functional literacy approach as opposed to a subject literacy or liberal arts orientation. They question the basis for defining functional literacy; they perceive functional literacy as middle-class societal expectations. These groups would prefer curricula oriented to grappling with the key cultural, philosophical, and subject-oriented traditions. This concern is not a new issue to adult literacy education circles; however, there is no definite basis to support or refute either concern. Both factions have strong perspectives and little empirical research support regarding the comparative significance of their particular approach and its effectiveness in the lives of the undereducated. Both raise the key issue of the nature and substance of learning outcomes for adult literacy programs.

And finally, as CBAE blends into the broad stream of literacy activities, this movement must develop interrelationships with other similar community and literacy education activities. The strength of adult literacy activities and the future of CBAE rests on its ability to collaborate and interrelate with community colleges, CETA programs, community action and social service agencies. Its future vitality rests on the care and thoughtfulness of this collaboration. CBAE programs may be extremely protective of their identity and territory; this isolationistic stance could create its own obsolescence. CBAE cannot continue to be a viable approach without interacting and sharing its process and content with other agencies which also impact with undereducated adults.

As stated by the Chinese proverb, "Give the hungry man a fish and tomorrow he will return for more. Teach the hungry man to fish and he will feed himself forever more." CBAE provides a process and approach to develop literate, self-reliant adults. As a new movement in adult literacy education, it offers a set of values and perspectives for continued reflection, dialogue, and experimentation.

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